CHINESE INSTRUMENTS IN A WESTERN CONTEMPORARY IDIOM
SELECTED WORKS OF CHEN YI

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show composer Chen Yi (b.1953)'s musical synthesis of East and West. Examples and analysis are made from the following selected pieces: *Fiddle Suite, The Points, Ancient Dances, Ning*, *Song in Winter*, *Chinese Fables* and *Ancient Beauty*, which all contain Chinese instruments. Technical issues of combining Chinese and Western instruments are discussed, as well as Chinese philosophy and the arts that inspire the pieces. In addition, examples are made to show the influences of Chinese traditional music in Chen's music, as well as the absorption of Western twentieth century compositional techniques as more systematic methods to support her compositions.

To Father and Mother

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to thank Dr. Chen Yi who generously provided her scores and recordings I needed for this study, free of charge. She also responded to my emails promptly and helped me find the answers to some of my questions. Many thanks to my advisor, Rick Taube, and the committee members who read my numerous revisions and helped make some sense of the confusion. Thanks to Mr. Walkington who proofread some chapters and fixed my computer problems when it crashed so many times during my writing. And finally, thanks to my parents and friends who endured this long process with me, always offering support and love.

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CHAPTER ONE

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Chen Yi, born in Guangzhou, China in1953, is a productive composer who is currently a professor of Music Composition at the Conservatory of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her works are frequently performed throughout Asia and the United States. Each year she composes five to ten pieces of music of varying lengths, performs live 150 to 200 times, participates in 15 to 20 residencies of many types, and sits on judging panels and general boards, in addition to many other international arts exchange projects and local community music events[1]. Her works are often inspired by Chinese aesthetics and Chinese arts and incorporate Chinese folk materials along with compositional techniques of 20th century music. She has composed for diverse ensembles ranging from solo work to chorus to orchestra with including Western and Chinese instruments.

Growing up in a family with strong interests in Classical music, Chen Yi began studying piano and violin around the age of three.[2] When Chen Yi was a teenager, she studied music theory with Zheng Zhong. Her studies with Zhong deeply affected her, imparting a reverence for Chinese culture, a characteristic defining much of her work over the course of her career. As she explains,

. . . [W]hen I was a teenager, my father invited my early theory teacher Mr. Zheng Zhong to teach me music theory and Chinese folk songs. This important mentor told me that,

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[1] Author's email correspondence with Chen Yi.

[2] John de Clef Piñeiro, "An Interview with Chen Yi," July 26, 2001; available from http://www.newmusicon.org/v9n4/v94chen_yi.htm; internet; accessed May 2008 (hereafter referred to as Piñeiro, "Interview."

since I drank from the Yangtze River's water as I was growing up, and was born with black hair and black eyes, I could understand Chinese culture better, and should be able to carry on the culture and share it with more people. That impressed me deeply and has influenced me my whole life. Later on, I started to do as he had suggested, and I still continue to work on it now.[3]

Although her musical studies and activities were suppressed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chen managed to secretly study music: "At first, I used to practice the violin with a heavy metal mute, and put a blanket between the hammers and the steel frame in the piano in order to be able to sight-read my father's score collection."[4] Later, at the age of seventeen, her musical talents helped her escape forced labor work during the Revolution. She was awarded the position of composer and concertmaster at the Beijing Opera Troupe Orchestra in Guangzhou, a position she held for seven years.

After the Cultural Revolution, she was one of the first composition students accepted to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. The study of both Western Classical music and Chinese folk music brought a unique style, blending East with West. While at the Beijing Opera Troupe in Guangzhou, she had sharpened her synthetic musical skills by orchestrating a mixture of Western and Chinese traditional instruments for government-approved groups. Later, while studying at the Central Conservatory, Chen Yi was introduced to a group of post-Revolution composers commonly named the "New Wave." Through their acquaintance she was exposed to developments in Western music post 1949. Sharing a similar musical aesthetic for blending folk materials with the

[3] Piñeiro, "Interview."
[4] Ibid.

organizational techniques of Western contemporary music, Chen Yi and the New Wave composers created an individual voice.[5]

In 1986, Chen presented a full evening concert of her orchestral music and became the first woman to receive a master's degree from the Central Conservatory. It was during this period that her career in the West blossomed. While studying music at Columbia University in New York City with Chou Wen-Chung, Mario Davidovsky and George Edwards, Chen Yi's enthusiasm for incorporating different musical styles allowed her to break the boundaries of culture and medium.[6]

Aim of the Study

Through close examinatin of pieces that incorporate Chinese traditional instruments with Western instruments, we can better understand Chen's unique style, as well as gain a more general understanding of how Chinese art is related to and absorbed into her music. The reason the study focus on the following pieces: *Fiddle Suite, The Points, Ancient Dances, Ning*, *Song in Winter*, *Chinese Fables* and *Ancient Beauty*, is that with their incorporation of Chinese instruments, the study extends the manifestation of Chen Yi's style of musical synthesis and the technical issues of incorporating Chinese and Western instruments. Her instrumentation contributes to a personal style that mixes Eastern and Western musical materials, timbre and texture. Beside the fact that the selected pieces contain Chinese instruments, the study is also based on a discussion with Chen Yi.

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[5] Melfi, Cheryl Ann "An Investigation of Selected Works by Chen Yi" (D.M.A. dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2005), 16 -17.
[6] Piñeiro, "Interview."

Not only does the instrumentation of the pieces in the study reflect her penchant for and knowledge of Chinese instruments, we also discover Chen's cultural background through her integration of Chinese art in her music. Although Chen Yi began her musical studies in the Western classical tradition, her cultural background unmistakably influences and inspires her aesthetic. Even with her command of the Western musical tradition, Chen remains deeply devoted to and moved by the traditional Chinese music of her childhood. A diversity of musical styles can be identified through careful study of her unique musical style. Through comparisons of her music with Chinese literature, the following chapter illustrates the core concept of her aesthetic and her commitment to keeping tradition as an abstracted form. It also helps readers gain a more general understanding of how Chinese art is related to and absorbed into her music. Following Chapter 2, which describes the general background ideas of selected pieces, Chapter 3, 4 and 5 contain analyses illustrating how she fuses old materials with new, supported by 20th century Western music theory. Through concrete analyses, we will see how traditional Chinese materials are abstracted in her music and how they are synthesized with Western concepts of musical organization. In addition, examinations made in this study show that her music is often a balance of semi-improvisation, a characteristic of Chinese music, and systematic organization, a characteristic of her Western musical training. In this process, comparisons are made to the music ideas of other Western composers, showing Chen's general absorption of 20th century Western music. Finally, detailed descriptions of extended techniques, using traditional Western notation, will help readers better understand the extended techniques of Chinese instruments.

CHAPTER TWO

INFLUENCE OF CHINESE ART IN CHEN YI'S PIECES

As a mentor, Professor Chou Wen-Chung of Columbia University made significant impact on Chen Yi's formal study while she was in the United States.[1] We can find similar approaches in the musical development of both composers. Chou's compositional style embodies the essence of Chinese aesthetics, specifically of the Confucian tradition (6th century BC), early Six Dynasties (3rd century AD) and Tao. According to K. Dewoskin, "The superior men of classical times were masters of the six arts—the rites, music, archery, riding, writing, computation. The aesthetics of the early Six Dynasties were masters of the *qin*, poets, painters, calligraphers, and conversationalists."[2] Through his study of Chinese classical poetry, music, calligraphy and painting, Chou cultivated an understanding of the Confucian idea of *Ya* which places importance on an individual's ability to cultivate several different subjects simultaneously. While in the United States, he studied Western contemporary music. Combining these concepts with what he learned during his childhood in China, he forged a new style[3].

Similarly, Chen Yi preserves Chinese traditions by combining other non-musical arts in to her music, reflecting her childhood exposure to Chinese culture: ". . . I believe that language can be translated into music. Since I speak naturally in my mother's tongue, in my music there is Chinese blood, Chinese philosophy and

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Kenneth Dewoskin, *Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1982), 158.

[3] Peter M. Chang, *Chou Wen-chung, The Life and Work of a Contemporary Chinese-Born American Composer* (Composers of North America) (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 3.

customs."[4]. Thrasher has said, "Because of the strength of China's long literary tradition, the study of [Chinese] music by Chinese and Western scholars alike has usually meant the study of historic or literati traditions."[5] And according to Edward Ho,

> In ancient China, a literatus must excel in the four activities of calligraphy, painting, *qin* playing and chess playing, all at the highest possible level . . . . Chinese literati music cannot be studied properly without relating it to other art-forms, for it invariably involves extramusical elements and is a social phenomenon that embraces other artistic activities such as poetry, literature, painting and calligraphy."[6]

By incorporating Chinese calligraphy, literature, poetry, and traditional Chinese instruments, Chen's attempt to relate music to other extramusical elements is similar to that of the ancient Chinese literati. To understand Chen's music, one must understand her origin. To do so one must understand the following pieces: *Chinese Fables*, *Fiddle Suite, The Points*, *Ancient Dances, Song in Winter, Ning*, *The Ancient Chinese Beauty*. Most of these pieces were commissioned or funded by organizations that promote and present Chinese culture to audiences. *Chinese Fables* and *The Ancient Beauty*, as well as *the Septet for Erhu, Pipa, Percussion and Sax Quartet* were commissioned by Music From China, *Song in Winter* was suggested by Dr. Joyce Lindoff, who asked for the piece for her Carnegie Hall concert. *Ancient Dances* was a commission from the pipa player Wu Man.[7] The selection of instrumentation is a result of discussion between the commissioner and the composer**.** By including Chinese instruments in her pieces, Chen is presenting Chinese virtuoso players to a broader audience. In doing this she arouses the audience's interest not only in

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[4] Piñeiro, "Interview"
[5] Thrasher A., "China", *Ethnomusicology: historical and regional studies, ed. H. Myers* (London), 1993, 330.
[6] Edward Ho, "Aesthetic considerations in understanding Chinese literati musical behavior," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol 6, 1997, 36.
[7] Author's email correspondence with Chen Yi.

Chinese instruments but also Chinese culture as a whole. Before we analyze Chen Yi's music, we will look at individual pieces to understand the philosophies and non-musical arts behind her music.

In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss the individual Chinese instruments that have inspired some of Chen's works. I will also discuss how non-musical influences display themselves in Chen's music, e.g. literature, poetry, calligraphy and painting.

Chinese Fables

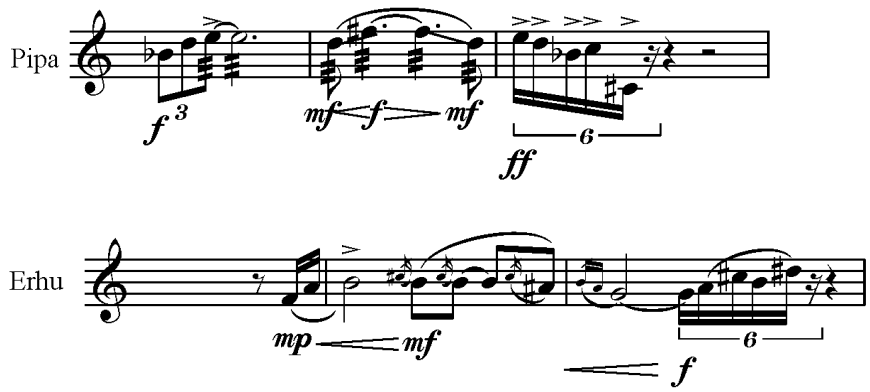
Chinese Fables, commissioned in 2002 by the ensemble Music from China, was inspired by the three old Chinese stories: "The Fox Profited by the Tiger's Might," "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf," and "The Snipe and the Clam."

> It's most inspiring when I learn some of the most popular Chinese fables in my childhood. They are so vivid and humorous, full of imagination, yet so deep and logical in thinking. I used a mixed Chinese and western instrumental ensemble, including two bowing and one plucking instruments, plus a group of percussion, to express my impression on three stories in my musical language.[8]

The three movements are rather short, similar in length to the original Chinese fables that they are based on. In addition, the musical structure of each movement follows the story's plot line. In the first movement, "The Fox Profited by the Tiger's Might," each character is represented by a particular instrument or leitmotif, shown in Example 1. The Fox's theme is characterized by its intervals of third and second in the beginning and sextuplets at the end, played with pipa and erhu thoughout the movement.

[8] Program notes written by Chen Yi, score is published by the Theodore Presser Company.

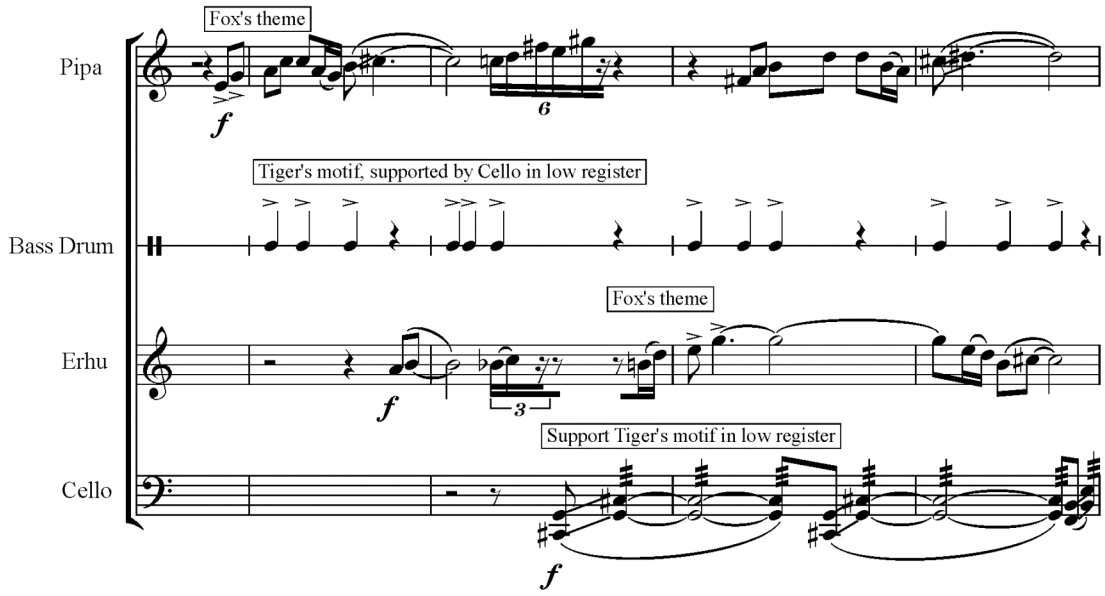
Example 2.1: Fox's theme



Chen described the first movement in the program note, "In the first movement, "The Fox Profited by the Tiger's Might," I used the erhu and the pipa to represent the flaunting fox who borrows the tiger's fierceness by walking in the latter's company, while the cello and the percussion in low register support the image of the tiger."[9] Example 2.2 shows musical depiction of the two characters of Fox and Tiger. The florid melodic lines with pipa and erhu's ornamentations contrast with the background materials of the percussion and cello sections, which have a relatively regular rhythm. The contrast of the two characters is also made in register, with the pipa and erhu in the high register and the low register of the percussion and cello.

[9] In Chen's program note, published by Theodore Presser Company.

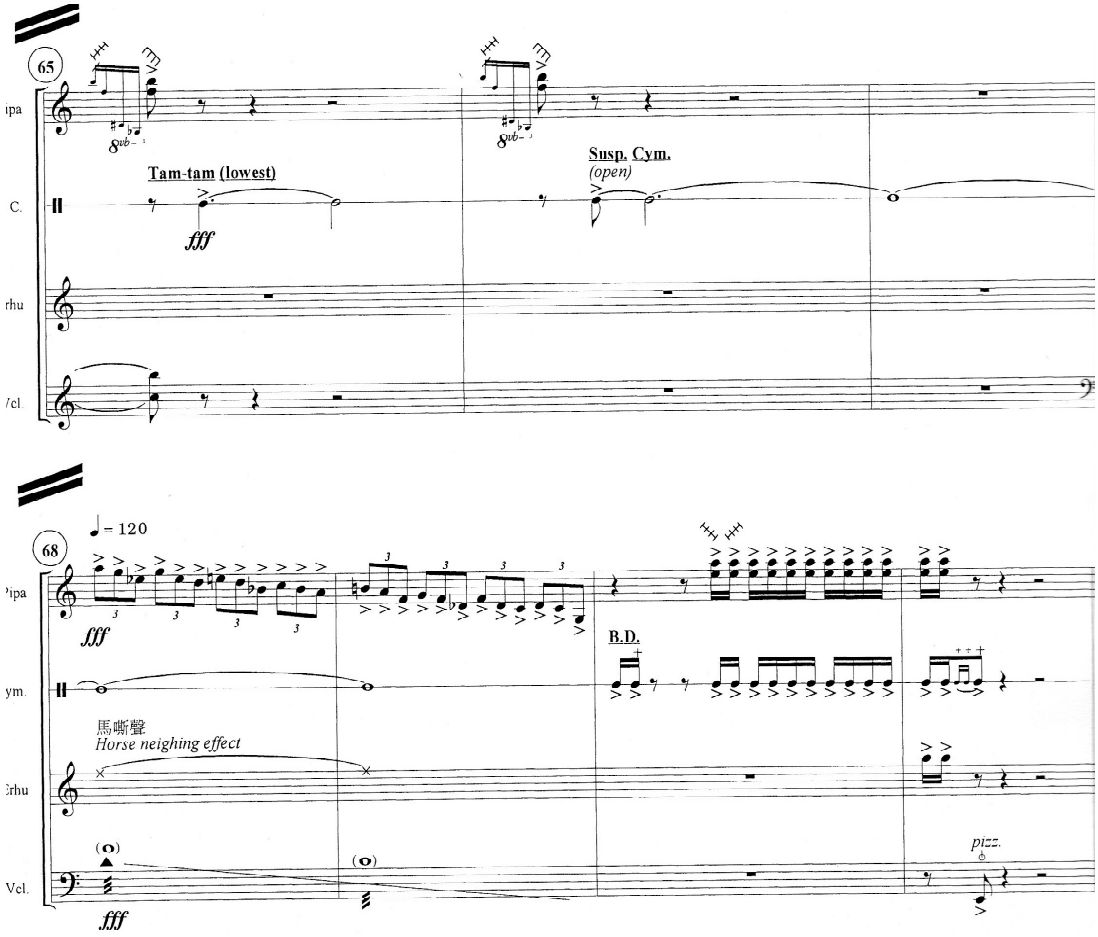
Example 2.2: *Chinese Fables*, The Fox Profited by the Tiger, bar 27 to 31



In the third movement, Chen Yi depicts a scene of a fight between a snipe and a clam and a fisherman who catches them without exerting any effort. In the first scene of the piece, the nutsbell, a high percussion instrument, aurally signifies the beginning of the fight between the snipe and the clam. Chen Yi "featured the percussions" high register in the texture made by all other instruments, to imagine the grapple scene between the snipe and the clam."[10] As the combat becomes more violent, the music becomes more intense with tremolos in pipa, erhu and cello. The lowest tam-tam awakens the snipe and clam, represented by pipa, erhu and cello, and the fisherman is revealed as the winner. As he captures the snipe and clam, we hear descending figures in the pipa and erhu parts.

[10]In Chen's program note published by Theodore Presser Company.

Example 2.3 ***Chinese Fables***, The Snipe and the Clam, bar 65 to 71



The music of *Chinese Fables* illustrates well-constructed orchestration, textures and harmonies, leaves the audience free to interpret the music in different ways.

Ancient Dances

Another piece that draws a larger connection between literature and music is Chen Yi's *Ancient Dances.* In "Aesthetic considerations in understanding Chinese literati musical behavior," Edward Ho discusses and applies the four basic stages of aesthetic law of Chinese poetry, "qi-cheng-zhuan-he" (start-continuation-change-coda), to

other arts[11]. Upon the application of the four basic procedures, a good writer still retains his own personal writing style. In *Ancient Dances*, Chen Yi expresses her thoughts on three poems of Li Bai (701-762), in three movements, "Cheering", "Longing" and "Wondering," aligning them to the four stages of the aesthetic law in the music. The first movement, "Cheering," is based on Li Bai's poem, "Riding on my Skiff:"

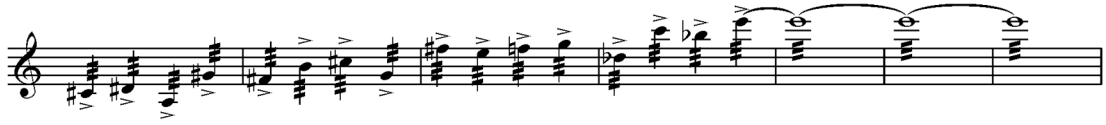
> Leaving at dawn the Baidi City crowned with cloud,
> I've sailed a thousand miles for Jiangling in a day.
> With screams of monkeys still the riverbanks are loud,
> My skiff has left ten thousand mountains far far away[12].

Although there are no divisions separating the four stages, as the thought is composed in a coherent plan, we can still hear where the points of departures are in the music from the poem. Each line in the poem manifests one of the four stages of aesthetic law. The first line of the poem represents the "start" section, presented in the music of the "Cheering" movement from bar 1 to 20, serving as an introduction. After the introduction, bars 21 to 89 serve as the section of "continuation" as it shares the same rhythmic idea--the repeat notes with accents from the introduction. The section not only continues the ideas from the introduction; it also reveals the character of the next section, "change," as from bar 83, the rhythmic ideas in the pipa gradually become constant, which is one of the characteristics in the "change" section. The "change" section represents the third stage of the law. The third line of the poem is the most dramatic part with the words "monkey's screaming," the only place in the poem using aural description instead of visual description to express the author's feeling. In accordance with the poem, the music in the third section from bar 90 to

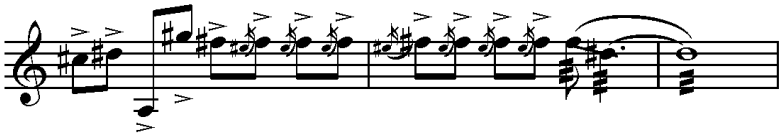
[11]Edward Ho, "Aesthetic considerations in understanding Chinese literati musical behaviour," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol. 6, 1997, 40-43.
[12] English translated by Chen Yi

137 is the most dramatic part as well. The repetitive figures become constant throughout this section. The percussion part uses different combinations of instruments, thus creating different sonorities than other sections in this movement. Starting at measure 138, the last section, "conclusion," sums up the musical ideas from the previous three sections, e.g., the pipa from bar 138 (Ex. 2.4) combines the musical figure from the introduction (Ex. 2.5) and the musical gesture in the second section (Ex. 2.6).

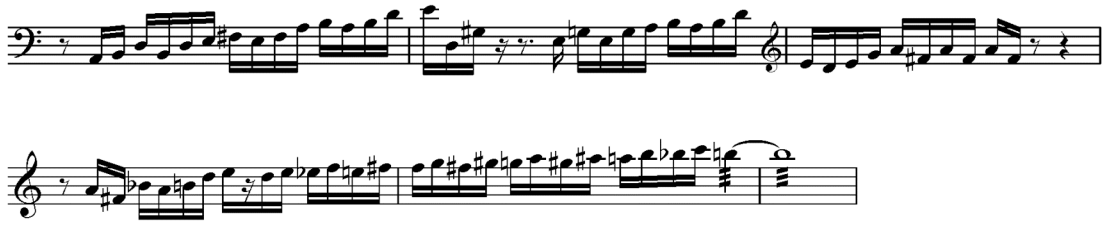
Example 2.4, **Ancient Dances, bar 138 to 144 in the last section**



Example 2.5, Ancient Dances, bar 12 to 14 in the introduction

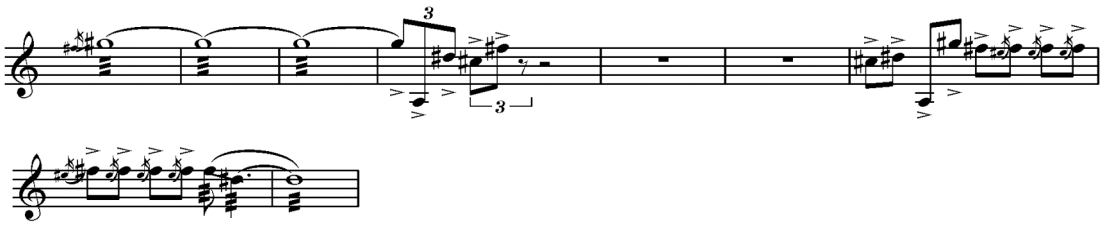


Example 2.6, Ancient Dances, bar 31 to 36 in the second section

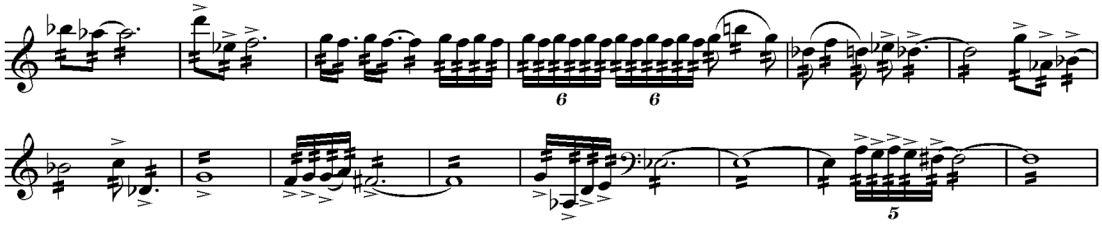


Another example of combined materials is shown in the solo pipa part at bar 162 (Ex. 2.8), which originated in the introduction (Ex. 2.7), now varied by elongation and inversion.

Example 2.7, Ancient Dances, pipa solo from bar 6 to 14 in the introduction



Example 2.8, Ancient Dances, pipa solo from 162 to 172 in the last section



In addition to the musical form having the same concept of development in four stages as in the aesthetic of the poem, the relationship between the poem and the music can be observed by comparing each line with the progression of music. The first line of the poem describes how high the Baidi City stands, implied by the words "crowned with cloud." In the introduction part in the music, we hear the pipa standing out, accompanied by the relatively high register and softer sounds played on bell. There are fewer interactions between the two instruments, pipa and percussion, compared to other sections in this movement. The second line of the poem suggests that by sailing rapidly, the seemingly far distant Jiangling is reachable within a day. Corresponding to the poem, the pipa's continuous, antiphonal sixteenth notes build to the third section. The third line of the poem, "With screams of monkeys still the riverbanks are loud," is presented in the music from bar 90, with the constant strumming of the pipa's four strings, and the piece reaches its most intense dynamic.

Here, this section also showcases the drama of *wu* (a standard musical form in Chinese opera). *Wu*, which means military, is contrasted with *Wen,* which is more artistic[13]. Finally, as with the last stage of aesthetic law, the music in the last section synthesizes the musical ideas that appeared earlier and gradually gets softer. Only the sound of a Japanese high woodblock is left at the end, reflecting the last line of the poem, "My skiff has left ten thousand mountains far far away." The last line projects the poet's light-hearted feeling during the trip after having received amnesty on his return to Jiangling, is reflected in the title of the movement—"Cheering"—given by Chen Yi.

The four-stage structure is also represented in the other two movements of *Ancient Dances*, "Longing" and "Wondering."

"Longing:"

Qi: bar 1-16; Cheng: bar 17-32; Zhuan: bar 33-76; He: bar 77-96

"Wondering:"

Qi: bar 1-24; Cheng: bar 25-65; Zhuan: bar 66-109; He: bar 110-165

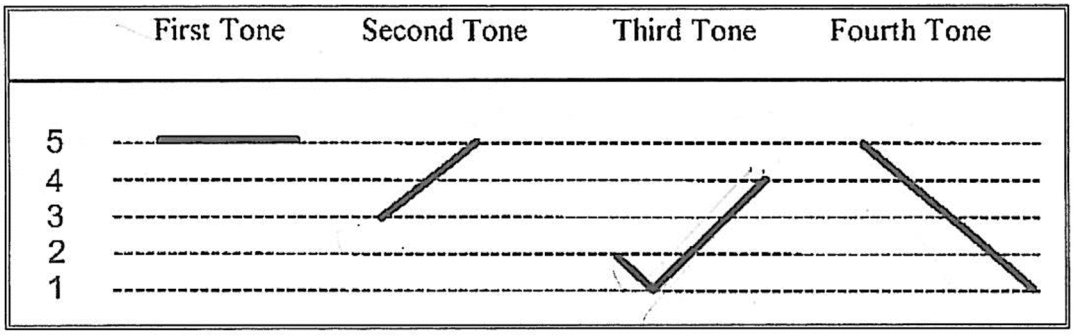
Fiddle Suite

Fiddle Suite, for huqin and string quartet, is another example of how Chen Yi uses literary inspiration in her music, but in a different way from how poetry is used in *Ancient Dances*. In *Fiddle Suite*, she uses a poem, "Bright moon, how oft art though with us?" by Sung Dynasty poet Su Shi (1036-1101). Unlike the function of the poem in *Ancient Dances*, in which the music mainly transmits the state of mind obtained from it, in *Fiddle Suite* Chen Yi present the beauty of the language itself by

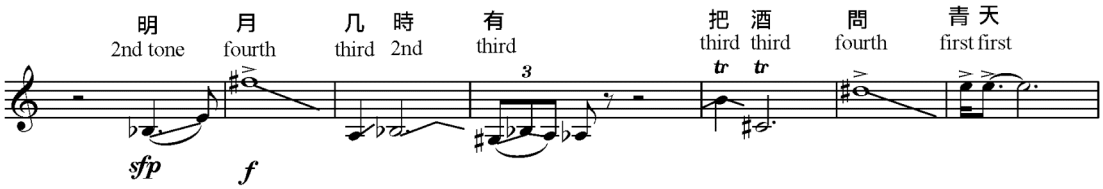
[13] Dolores Menstell Hsu, "Musical Elements of Chinese Opera," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Oct., 1964): 439-451.

reciting the poem acoustically, mimicked by the Chinese instrument. Chinese singers carefully enunciate the inflections of words because in Chinese different inflections can change the meaning of the monosyllabic word completely. Thus the focus of tonal inflections in Chinese vocal music is important, because the inflections not only deliver the meaning of words, but also create nuances from emphasizing the pronunciation of the words, and this is reflected in the music by elements such as ornamentations, quarter tone pitch bending and different speed of glissandos. The same focus of tonal inflections in words can be found in the second movement of *Fiddle Suite*, on the text "Bright moon, how oft art though with us?" However, there are no spoken words in this piece. Chen Yi selects the two-string instrument, the zhonghu*,* to imitate the exaggerated singing voice of Chinese operatic style. The zhonghu belongs to the hu-qin family, which lacks a fingerboard. Thus, the singing effect is easily accomplished through the use of glissando. Techniques such as using glissandi at different speeds and with varying effects , e.g. glissando with trills, microtonal trills, tremolo with wide vibrato, etc., can be found in this movement, in which Chen captures the enchanting and subtle inflections of Chinese vocal music. On the other hand, while the zhonghu's solos remind the listener of a more Western musical style, i.e., Schoenbergian *Sprechstimme*, Chen Yi carefully composes the musical shapes to correspond to the text's tonal inflections. The diagram below shows four different tonal inflections in the Chinese language using a scale of one to five, one being the lowest tone, five the highest. When we compare the four tonal inflections of the words of the text with Chen's melodic contour played by the zhonghu, it is clear that the music is generated according to inflections of the poem. The musical example is indicated with four different tonal inflections, representing four different contours, according to Table 2.1.

Table 2.1, Tonal inflections in Chinese language[14]



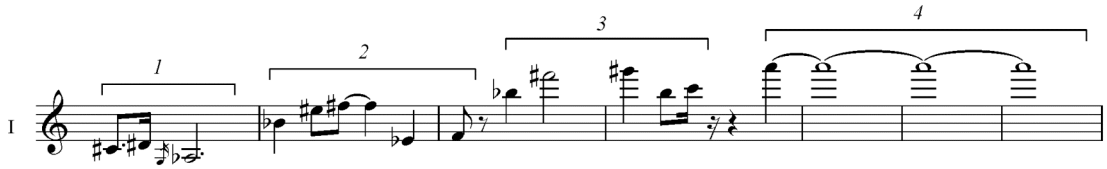
Example 2.9, *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting, bar 12 to 18



Example 2.9 shows the Chinese poem used in this movement with Chinese characters indicated above the staff, coinciding with the literal tonal transformation of the recitation. Although the zhonghu's pitches and contour reflect the general tonal inflections of the recitation of the poem, Chen Yi still tries to create the musical unification through pitch, figures and phrase structure. The examples shown below not only demonstrate their coherent rhythmic ideas, but also present similar phrase segments and intervallic relationships among the musical phrases that can be found in the examples below.

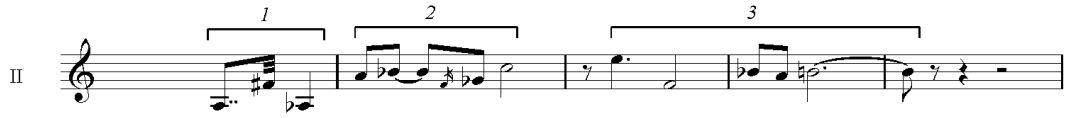
[14] Yao, Liu and others, *Integrated Chinese*, Textbook level 1, part 1 (Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, Inc., 2005), 16.

Example 2.10, *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting, bar 39 to 67



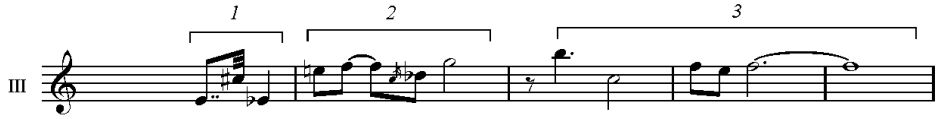
M2 m2

bar 51 to 55



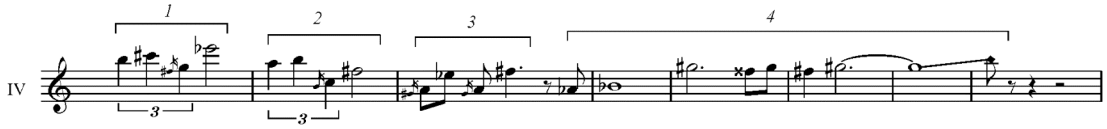
M6 A6 m9 m2 p4 m2 A4 M7 P4 m2 M2

bar 55 to 59



M6A6 m9 m2 p4 m2 A4 M7 P4 m2 m2

bar 60 to 67



M2 m2

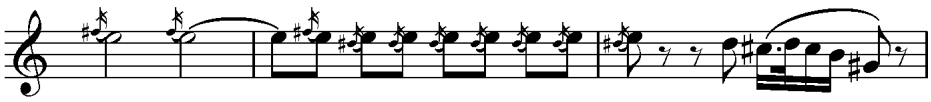
As we can see in the examples above, phrases I and IV share a four-segment structure with similar musical contour. Likewise, phrases II and III share a three-segment structure with similar music contour. Moreover, segment 1 in phrase I and IV share the same intervals of major second and minor second. Although based on different text, phrase III is a literal transposition of phrase II.

The instrument mimics the tonal inflections of language. However, while they are intended to convey the emotional state and circumstance of a character, the vocal sounds in Chinese opera are not intended to be natural. Often the vocal range is extremely wide. The zhonghu presents the exaggerated nasal voice of Chinese operatic singers and perfectly transmits the surreal feeling of the poem*:*

> I would like to ride the wind, make my home there,
> Only I fear in porphyry towers, under jade eaves,
> In those high places the cold wind would be more than I could bear.
> So I rise and dance and play in your pure beams,[15]

The *hu qin* family, to which the zhonghu belongs, is commonly used as the accompaniment in Chinese operatic arias.[16] However, Chen Yi's operatic setting of this piece switches the instrument's role to that of a solo instrument. Although the zhonghu presents the lead role of singing parts in this piece, some of the elongation at the ends of the phrases show the dotted rhythms, a typical musical figure for hu qin in the solo repertoire, which is also reminiscent of the accompanimental figures of Chinese operatic arias. Thus the role of the instrument is changed somewhat in this movement.

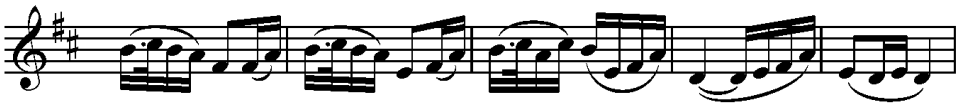
Example 2.11, "Reciting," bar 16 to 21



Example 2.12, "Reciting," bar 28 to 31

[15]Translated by Burton Watson, *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p'o*, (Boston: Copper canyon press, 1994), 67.
[16] Bliss Wiant, *The Music of China* (Hong Kong: Chung Chi Publications, Chung Chi College, 1965), 96.

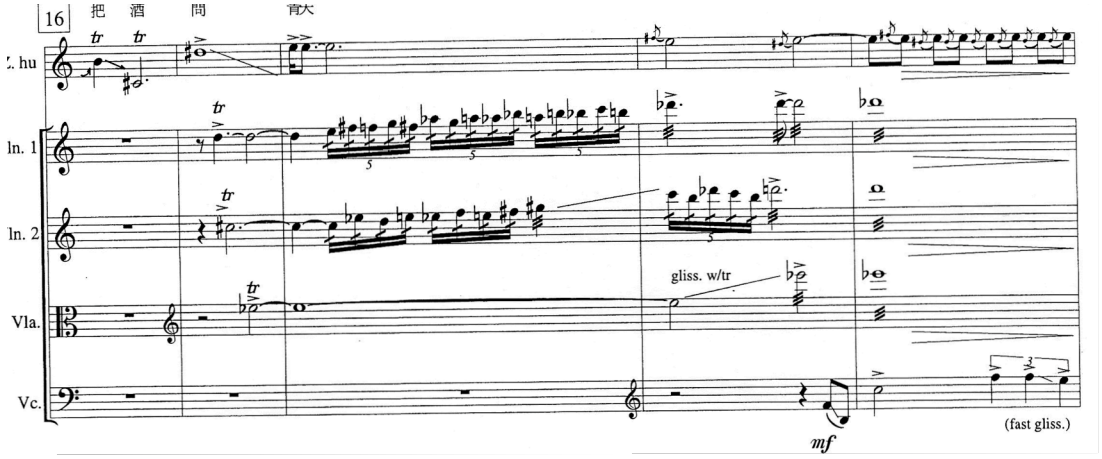
Example 2.13, Dotted rhythm in Liu Tianhua's piece: *Reciting During Leisure*[17], bar 37 to 39



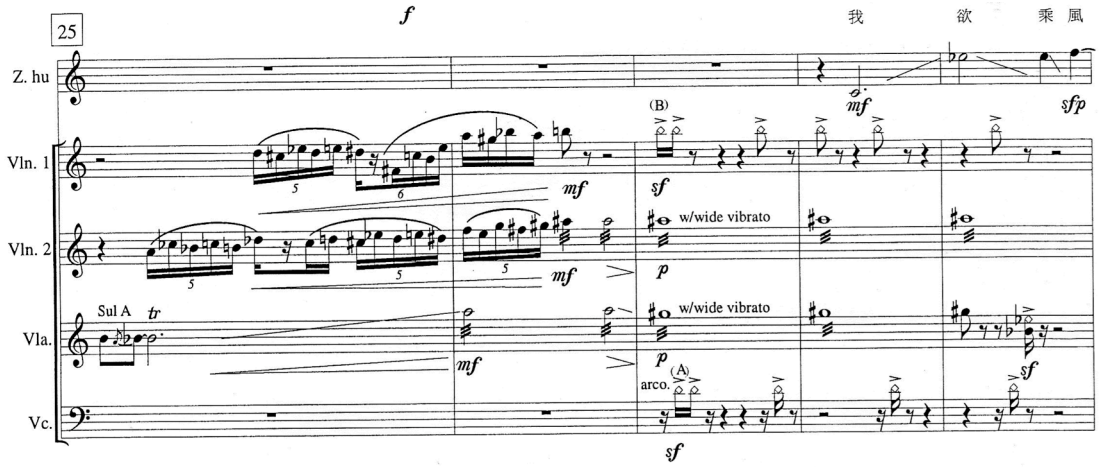
In addition to the presentation of the reciting voice in *Fiddle Suite*, Chen Yi tries connecting the poem and the music through text-painting. For example, while the zhonghu recites the line, "Lifting my wine, I question the blue sky." the string quartet, which serves as accompaniment in this movement, gradually moves to a higher register, eventually surpassing the *zhonghu*'s register, to depict the high sky in the music (Ex. 2.14, bar 18). The same idea is carried over to the next line of the poem and corresponds with the music. Symbolizing the remote distance of the poetry, we hear high harmonics beginning in measure 27 as the instrument recites *"*I would like to ride the wind, make my home there, only I fear in porphyry towers, under jade eaves, in those high places the cold wind would be more than I could bear. " (Ex. 2.15). Appearing in the beginning of measure 44 a rapid musical gesture, corresponds to the previous passage with the Violin melodic line reciting: "So I rise and dance and play in your pure beams," (Ex. 2.16).

[17] Music example taken from Jonathan Stock's "Contemporary recital solos for the Chinese two-stringed fiddle *erhu"*, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol 1., Fig. 1.

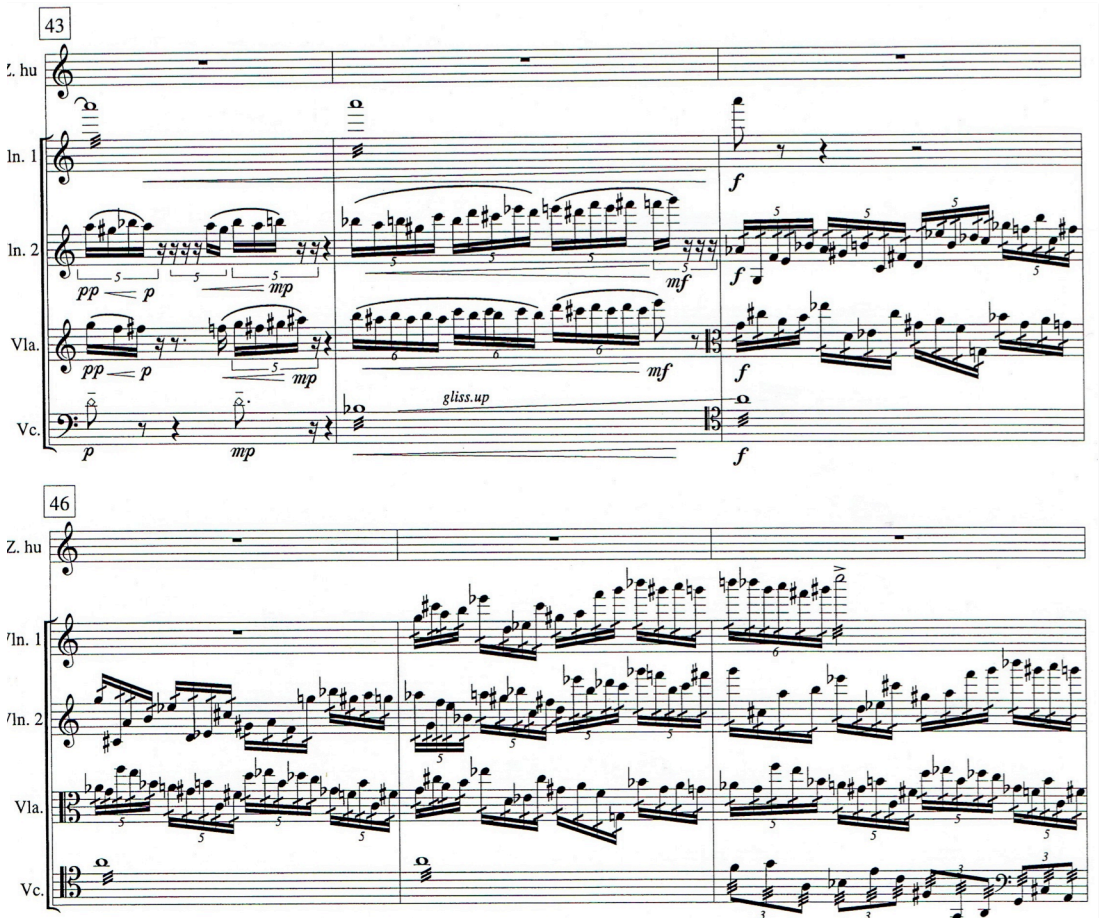
Example 2.14: Example of text-painting in *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting



Example 2.15: Example of text-painting in *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting

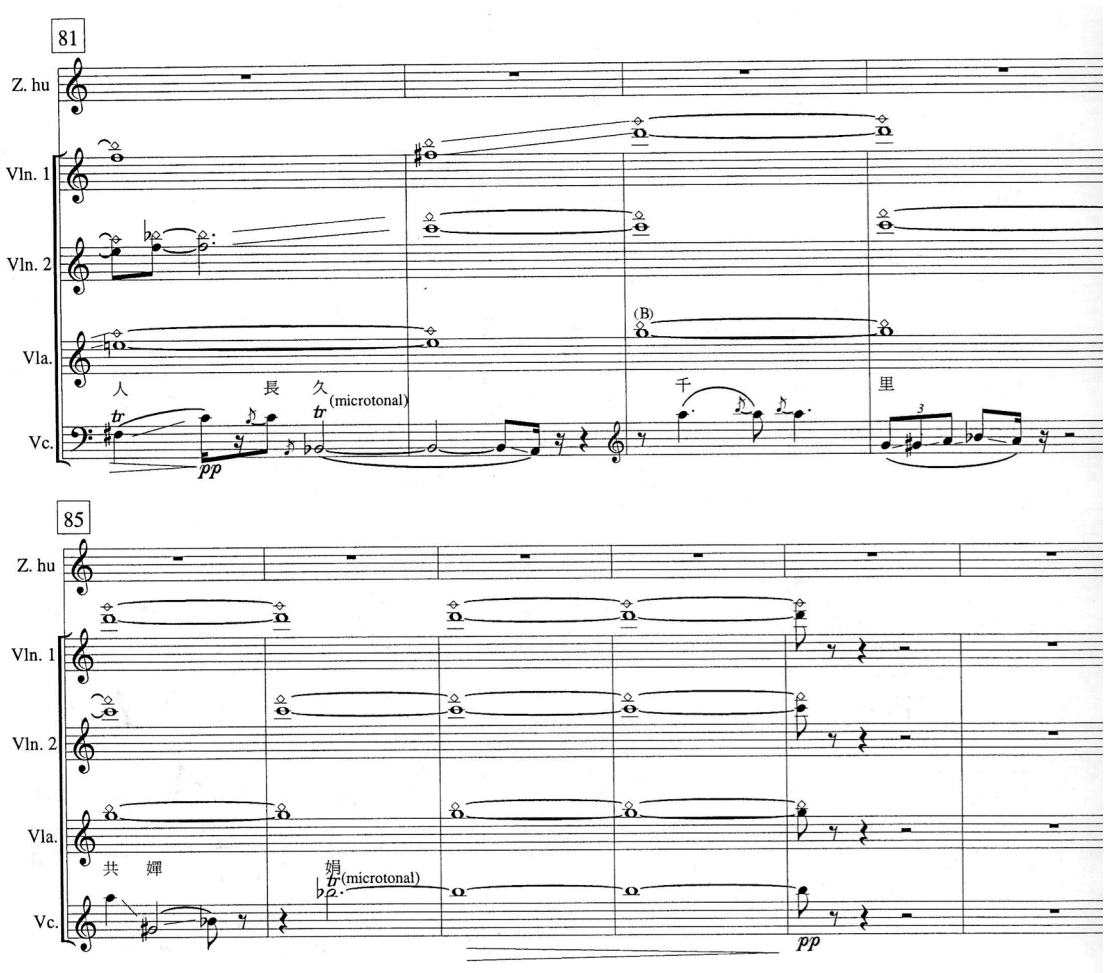


Example 2.16: Example of text-painting in *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting



Again this movement contains allusions to Chinese opera. The viola and cello's pizzicato gestures are reminiscent of the Chinese instrument *san-hsien* ("three-strings"), which is one of the main accompanimental instruments of Chinese opera. The last two commentary sentences of Su Shi's poem, "A thousand miles apart and wishing upon the same gentle moon that everyone lives long and well," are given to the cello, continuing the musical synthesis of Chinese instruments and western instruments. By playing with microtones and blending with the string quartet's artificial harmonics, Chen Yi's careful choice of timbre attempts to seize the poetry's shift with a coda, ending the piece with the sounds of whispering and finally vaporizing into air.

Example 2.17: Ending in *Fiddle Suite*, Reciting



The Points

In *Fiddle Suite*'s third movement, Chen Yi uses her imagination to combine the non-musical art of calligraphy into her music. With the fast figures of jinghu and string quartet, the physical movements of the calligrapher and the image of ink dancing on the paper are vividly captured. Similarly, calligraphy is employed in her piece, *The Points* for solo pipa. Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi depicts the expressiveness of the pipa's sound in his famous poem, "*Song of a pipa player*"

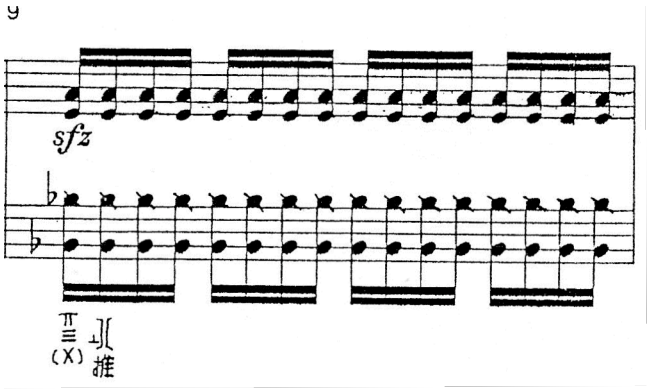
> The thick strings loudly thrummed like the pattering rain;
> The fine strings softly tinkled in murmuring strain.
> When mingling loud and soft notes were together played,
> 'Twas like large and small pearls dropping on plate of jade.

The last line vividly transmits the technique of playing pipa. Each single plucked sound of the pipa played along with others comprise the whole melodic line. With each single pluck sounding clearly and crisply, combined with sweeping hand gestures, the pipa is reminiscent of large and small pearls dropping on a plate of jade. The title *The Points* presents the pipa music as if it were composed out of sonic points. E.g., the most common pipa technique is *Lun*, a rapid reiteration of five fingers, producing an effect similar to tremolo. Instead of making stationary points on the paper, the points of starting touch in calligraphy always show the incoming moving gestures and directions. The varying degrees of intensity of ink express the artist's conception of nature, and his own emotions and individuality. In this music, the succession of portamenti, strumming, and various kinds of pitch bends represent the careful weight control and speed of moving a calligraphy brush on paper. Also, the up-and-down contours of the fast notes (measure 71) represent the free-floating motion of a calligrapher's rhythm. The physicality of playing strums on the pipa—utilizing different strengths of hand-movements—is similar to performing calligraphy. A good calligrapher does not use the same force at all times but alternates the process of lifting up and pressing down in rhythm. Not only does it capture the spirit of calligraphy, *The points* also presents the essentials of writing technique: "The eight standard strokes in Chinese calligraphy start with the points in different touches. There are sensitive articulations and gestures in the drawing, which enlightened the composer with the musical inspiration…"[18] The technique of the eight standard strokes in calligraphy is called "the eight strokes of yong." The Chinese character "yong," meaning "eternity" and containing all of the techniques of calligraphy, exemplifies the movements of the eight basic strokes. While writing "yong," each

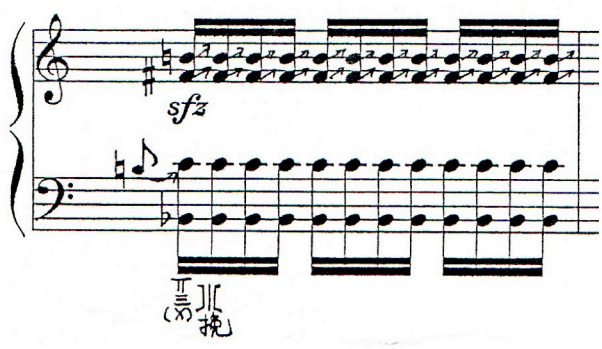
[18] Program note in the score of *The Points*.

stroke may be separate, though calligraphers strive to complete the shape with a continuous spirit. In this sense, Chen Yi writes using "yong," connecting and integrating each musical gesture to form a coherent piece. In the book *Gate to Chinese Calligraphy*, Guo Bonana mentions the techniques of *qi bi* (start a stroke) and *shou bi* (end a stroke): "If you want to write a horizontal stroke, you must hold the brush perpendicularly to begin with. To do a perpendicular stroke, begin it horizontally. [. . .]When you end your perpendicular stroke, you must make the stroke appear like dew about to drop. When you end your horizontal stroke, you must proceed to the right and then come back to the left."[19] Although Chen Yi did not describe in words the analogy of stroke gestures in her music, similar physicality can be found with the employment of left hand techniques, presented in following musical examples.

Example 2.18: The left-hand technique "push" and "pull" in *The Points*, bar 9 and 10



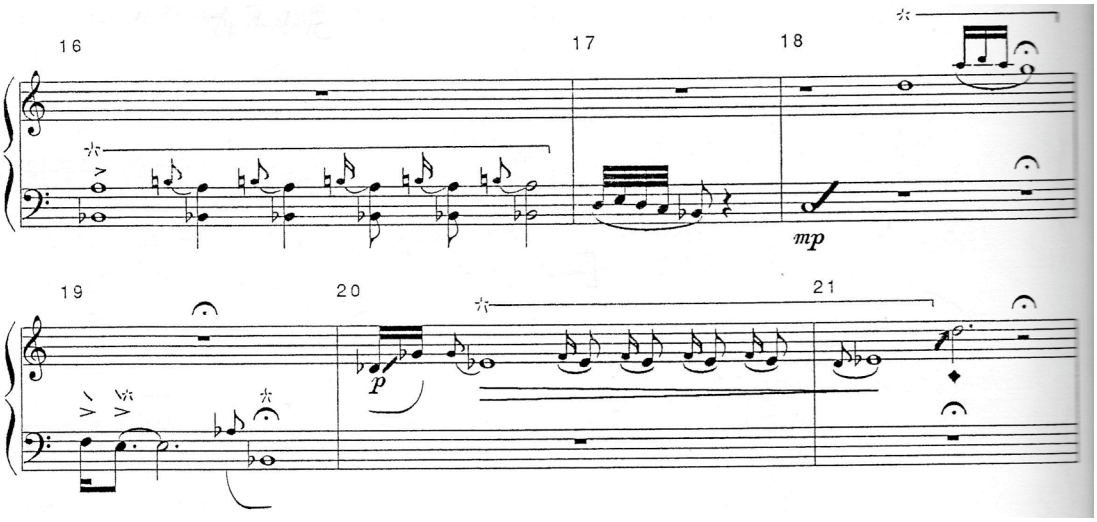
[19] Guo Bonana, *Gate to Chinese Calligraphy* (Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1995), 19.



The characters of 推 (push) and 挽 (pull) are indicated in the score as left-hand techniques. The technique 推 indicates using left-hand finger to press the string tightly against the fret and then push the string toward the right side, whereas 挽 indicates pull the string toward the left side.

Example 2.19 illustrates the beginnings and ends of strokes. The fermatas between the phrases are like the “lift” and “suspend” when manipulating the brush.

Example 2.19: *The Points*, bar18 to 20

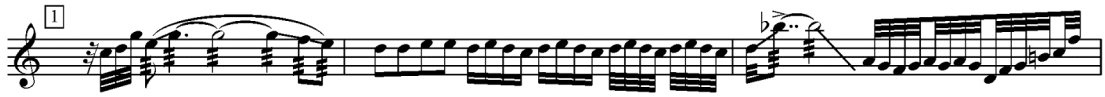


The eight basic strokes in calligraphy (labeled as 1 to 8) are

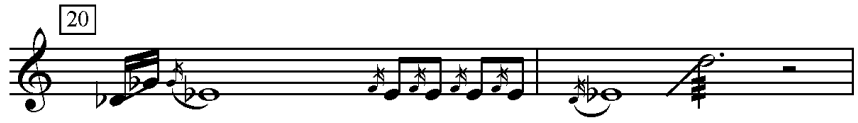
1. dot
2. dash
3. perpendicular down-stroke
4. down-stroke left, or left-falling stroke
5. wavelike stroke, or right-falling stroke
6. hook
7. upstroke to the right
8. bend or twist[20]

Though left to the listener's imagination and interpretation, the connection between the shape of the strokes and the music is obvious. The following examples are to help the reader understand the possible interpretation of the relationship between the music and calligraphy. The physicality of employing calligraphy is reflected in the physical playing with left or right hand techniques and also in music gestures in *The Point*s. Comparing the musical examples below with strokes in the diagram, analogy between the two media can be made. The upward and downward glissando in Ex. 2.20 shows the bend gesture; the glissando upward in Ex. 2.21 shows the up-stroke; Ex. 2.22 the short sounds made with harmonics can be interpreted as dot gesture.

Example 2.20: The Points, the bend gestures, bar 1 and 3

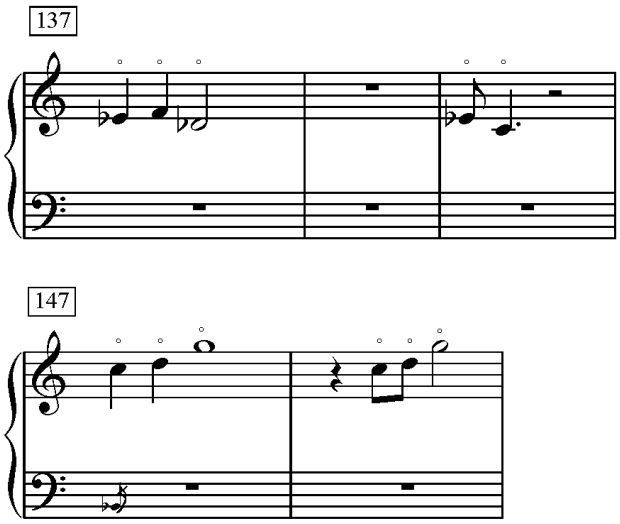


Example 2.21: The Points, the up-stroke, bar 20 and 21



[20] Ibid.

Example 2.22: The Points, the dot gesture, bar 137 to 139 and 147 to 148



<u>*Song in Winter*</u>

In his book, *The Way of the Pipa*, John Myers mentions that there are certain subjects that are quite common in Chinese fine arts such as mountain peaks with flowing water, gnarled pines and craggy rocks. It is a requirement for artists to refine the old styles rather than trying to revolutionize and overthrow the old schools.[21] Despite repeating similar subjects in Chinese landscape paintings artists no longer want to duplicate the sceneries, but rather want to create their own personal styles and spirits. The concept of musical landscapes in Chen Yi's pieces *are Song in Winter*, *Song of the Great Wall*, *Singing in the Mountain*, *Four Seasons, Landscape*, *Happy Rain in Spring Night*, etc. Those pieces represent the spirits of ancient Chinese landscape painting that the spiritual or philosophical conviction is more important

[21] John E. Myers, *The Way of the Pipa: Structure and Imagery in Chinese Lute Music* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), 47.

than the actual image of the subjects, in other words, *yijing*,[22] the state of sublimation of an artistic image allied with inner vision and poeticism is achieved in the pieces. In her piece *Song In Winter*, Chen explains,

> The idea came from the imagination of the pine and bamboo. They are so persistent and dauntless. Standing in the frigid winter, they are evergreens…I admire their beautiful appearances and their strong spirit. I express my feelings through my music, which combines Chinese and Western musical materials and media…."

The works of the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei have been praised for containing the vision of paintings in his poetry. Likewise, in Chen Yi's music, listeners can perceive the philosophy of Chinese paintings in the work. Bamboo and pine are the familiar objects that are frequently painted by artists in China. They represent the image of fortitude and immortality. In Chinese aesthetics, artists observe nature and use it as a metaphor to express their noble thoughts into works. We can often find that those natural objects such as plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, etc., are personified and their philosophy of striving for survival are embodied in the artist's works and these served as moral principles for literati to pursue. For example, in the Analects of Confucius: Chilly Winter, the pine and the cypress are the last to wither. Chen Yi's piece *Song in Winter* is inspired by the natural objects bamboo and pine, which are presented by the instruments dadi, zheng and harpsichord. Although one is Chinese and the other is Western, the zheng and the harpsichord are both plucked instruments and share the same quality of timbre, separating their softer and sharper sounds from the timbre of the dadi, which is made of bamboo. The dadi plays the main melodic lines, the zheng and the harpsichord's parts are mostly in response to the dadi's main gesture. Sometimes the parts circle and ornament around the main

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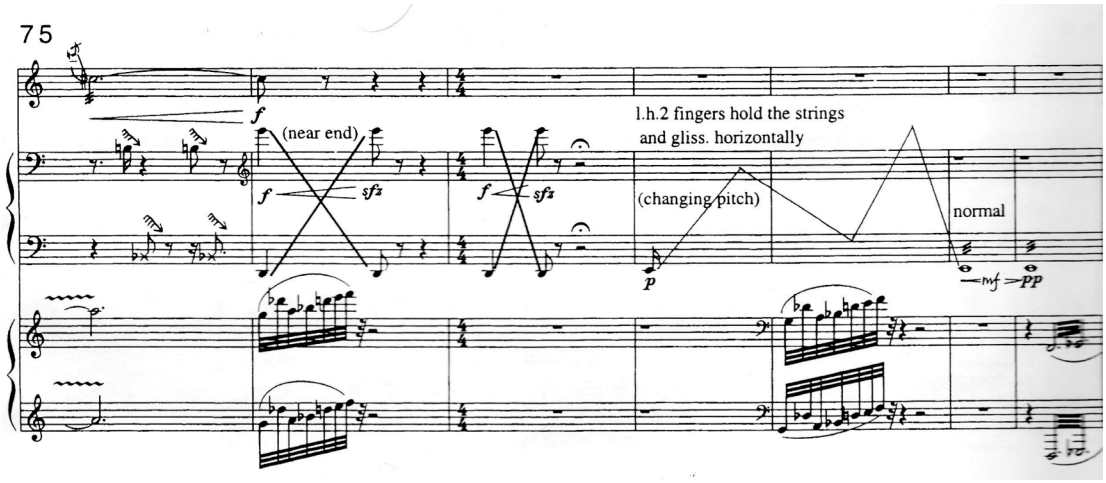
[22] Edward Ho talks about *yijing* in "Aesthetic considerations in understanding Chinese literati musical behaviour," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 1997, 45

line of the dadi; sometimes these act as background texture and help create intensity in the piece, painting the interaction between wind and plants. The wave-like gestures of the three instruments and the free glissando parts of the zheng in the musical background are reminiscent of the pine and bamboo swinging and swaying constantly in the mercurial winds.

One of the Chinese aesthetics presented in *Song in Winter* is space. In Chinese paintings, in order to show the magnitude of the object, the background of the painting can be omitted with use of space in the individual style of the painter. The freedom of determining the size and shape of the blank spaces on the drawing paper gives the painter leeway to create his own imagination and expression on the familiar object that represents the law of nature. As Chen Yi says about the piece, "The silence between the gestures is like the space in Chinese brush painting and calligraphy." The pauses between the repetitive gestures of the dadi from bar 11 to bar 14 create some kind of static yet intense feeling, although followed by the complete silence of the dadi from bar 15 to 17, the space is filled by the repetitive gestures of the zheng and the harpsichord which continuously build tension. The intense atmosphere is finally released by long notes at the end of each short line of the dadi from bar 17 to 30. From bar 76 to 83 we can see similar gestures but with more silence between the repetitive gestures, so that instead of creating intensity, it leaves a calmer and timeless feeling.

Example 2.23: Silence in *Song in Winter*



The Ancient Beauty

Another example of musical portrait of symbolized auspicious objects is in *The Ancient Beauty*. The texture in this piece is similar to *Song in Winter*. Instead of orchestrating the main line with instruments playing together, Chen uses one Chinese instrument as the main foreground material, supported by other instruments creating textural background. It symbolizes the interaction between the subject and the object, e.g., bamboo and pine versus nature; individual human being (symbolized by taotie and clay figurines) versus society. Using objects such as bamboo, pine, taotie and clay figurines that embody the spirit of determination and fortitude to reflect the moral principles as an inspiration to human beings, Chen Yi's pieces often advocate the beauty of Chinese culture. Commissioned by the Philadelphia Classical Symphony and Music From China, *The Ancient Chinese Beauty* shows Chen's impression of the designs of the fierce-looking taotie patterns, which serve as an auspicious symbol showing endurance and strength against evil, used in sacrificial ceremonies. In this movement, there are main foreground lines played alternatively by xin, zheng, erhu, and pipa. Xin and erhu play the similar ornamented long lines; zheng and pipa play more pointillistic material. Strings play mostly background materials, although

sometimes the strings have their own passage to intensify the main lines. The music also expresses a primitive feeling by preserving the traditional music figures of the Chinese instruments. In the second movement of *The Ancient Chinese Beauty*, entitled "The Clay Figurine," Chinese clay figurines represent the beauty of human power that can conquer the material world. They also show the importance of revitalizing the previous life of the deceased so they are buried with the dead in tombs. Although the clay figurines are not always in the same proportion as real people, the style of clothing and the different activities depicted serve as touchstones to the ancient cultures and life-styles of different Chinese dynasties. Most importantly, the spirit of true-to-life facial expressions on the figurines is the high art of humanity. We can find the similar ideas of the figurines' art reflected in the musical gestures in the second movement. The short and rapid gestures of *arpeggiation* in the zheng and pipa show the exaggerated postures and expressions of the figurines; the free glissando of strings and zheng show the motion of the sweeping movements of the figurines. No matter what the listeners perceive from the music, whether the figures of dancers or acrobats, the music gives the audience their own images about the characters. Such is the magic residing in the art of music.

Ning

Observing Chinese taotie and clay figures is a good way to understand Chinese history since the varied designs reflect the life-styles of different dynasties. Chen's pieces give people a way to rediscover history while at the same time appreciating the pure spirit of her musical interpretation of different culturally-related themes. In her interview with Minnesota Public Radio, she mentioned the aspects of using the subject of history in music as a means to educate her audience coming from different cultural backgrounds. In her opinion:

[…]music is also abstract and that could last longer as an art form. And we could use that as the inspiration to share with the next generation. ... I think that is not a kind of propaganda. It's not a kind of a straightforward education, but that could last longer. Like a lingering remembering experience.

In the piece *Ning*, she gives her impression of the atrocious battle between China and Japan in the capital of Ning in China during the WWII. The purpose is to remind people of the war through music in the hope that people will bring peace and avoid repeating past mistakes[23]. The piece *Ning*, commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota with a grant from the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University, and the Hoeschler Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation, was premiered by Young-Nam Kim, violin; Yo-Yo Ma, cello; and Wu Man, pipa, at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 30, 2001. The piece was composed for remembrance and reconciliation in commemoration of the Asian Holocaust 1937 Nanjing Massacre and presented as part of the concert series "Bridge of Souls," paying homage to the victims and survivors of war atrocities and their descendants. As Chen described in her program note:

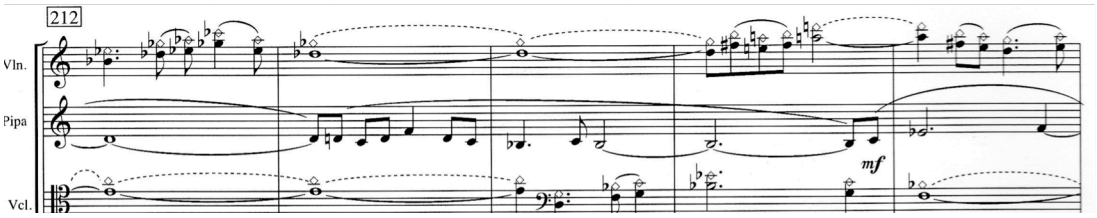
The music is composed in a dramatic shape, symbolizing the sound of atrocious violence and tragic scenes, hysterical crying and miserable sobbing, gripping meditation and illusive fantasy, performed on the bowing and plucking instruments, combining unique styles and performing techniques in the music of East and West, in an abstract form and texture.[24]

Although we can still find similar materials used in other pieces resides *Ning*, the linear lines in this piece have a longer stretch and wider extension of register, and express a lamentation-like feeling. Unlike her other pieces, in which the extended techniques and different kinds of vibratos present oriental flavor, these same materials

[23] Interviewed by Dan Olson, Minnesota Public Radio, May 2001; available from http://music.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/0109_hun_qiao/yi_transcript.shtml; access May 2008.

used in *Ning* represent human mourning due to the war. From bar 200, musical metaphor can be discovered. The cello line shows the property of intervals that are similar to the Japanese musical scale. At bar 206, a Chinese folk song, *Jasmine Flower,* is fragmented and transposed, with timbral alternation between notes and harmonics.

Example 2.24: Chinese folk song *Jasmine Flower* in *Ning*



Chen Yi's music expresses the ideas of the ancient Chinese literati's aesthetics of the arts. The Chinese literati believed that philosophies in the arts are all related, and that to master the activities in the different fields of art helps people to have better mental health and character. Chen Yi's music not only synthesizes the philosophies among the arts, it also brings together Eastern and Western instruments into a unique style of music. She carefully maintains the balance of the synthesis when using the materials from East and West, and these are transformed and abstracted in her style so that the idea of preservation does not overpower her originality.

CHAPTER THREE

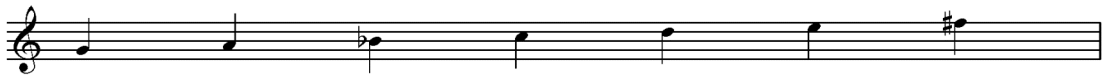
CHINESE MUSICAL LANGUAGE IN CHEN YI'S MUSIC

Chen's integration of Chinese traditional materials can be observed from smaller units such as musical figures to larger structures such as phrase divisions. In this chapter, we will look at the details of Chinese musical elements, such as ornamentation styles, and the idiosyncratic extended techniques of the traditional instruments and see how Chen applies these to Western instruments as part of her musical synthesis. In addition to these traditional materials in her music, we will also examine the way she integrates and transforms these materials into a new style of her own. Furthermore, although some materials in her music are not folk-like, we can still see traits in them that are similar to the traditional ones, such as the phrase development in her music.

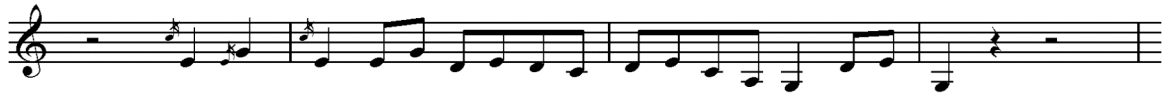
Traditional Materials in Chen Yi's Music

Chen Yi's enthusiasm for Chinese traditional music is naturally shown in her own music by her use of diverse Chinese instrumental settings. Of the selected pieces, we can see the reflection of *qinqian*, a genre of Chinese opera of the northwest province of Shaanxi, in *The Points,* where the *chih* scale (see Figure 3.1) is employed. *Qinqian* is based on the *chih* scale. In addition to the clear manifestation of the *chih* scale in *The Points*, other traits of *qinqian* can be seen in the musical figures resembling the singer's style in *qinqian* opera.

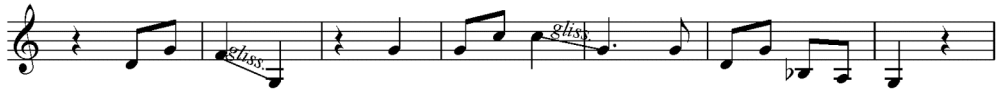
Figure 3.1: Chih scale in *qinqian*



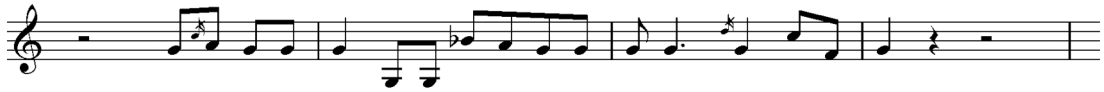
Example 3.1 to 3.3: Excerpts from ***Broken Mountain and River***, sung by Wang Tian-Ming (transposed to C major)



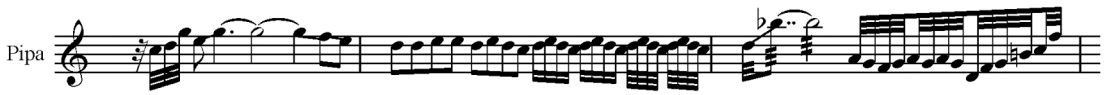
Example 3.2



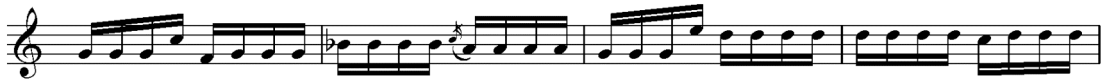
Example 3.3



Example 3.4: *The Points*, bar 1 to 3



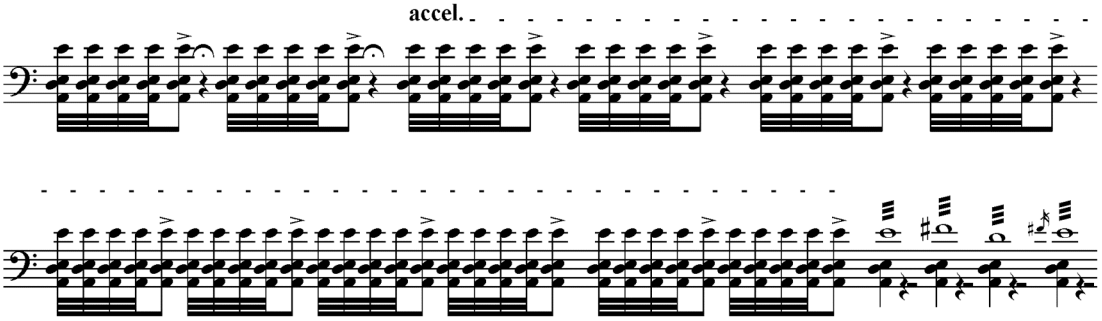
Example 3.5: *The Points*, bar 30 to 33



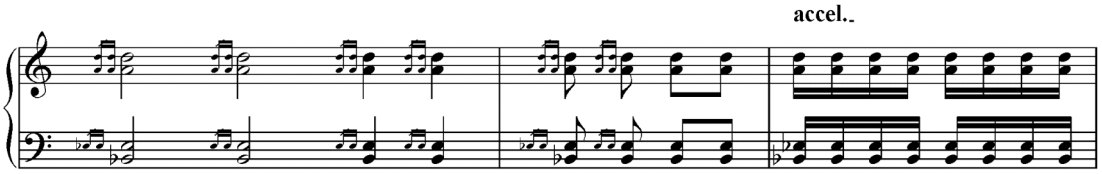
By comparing Ex. 3.1 to Ex. 3.3, the excerpts from the original *qinqian* melodies and Ex. 3.4 and 3.5, passages from Chen's *The Points*, we find similarities. For example, Ex. 3.1 and Ex. 3.4 show the similar musical contour of circling pitches D E D C. Ex. 3.2 and Ex.

3.4 show the subtlety of pitch bending which is a typical quality of *qinqian* singing; Ex. 3.3 and Ex. 3.5 show the repeated notes emphasizing the fifth scale degree with decorative notes. However, although the *chih* scale is used in *The Points*, it is used in an untraditional way as the scale is harmonized differently and with added non-harmonic tones. Some of the rhythmic figures in *The Points* come from Chinese percussion music, which can also be found in the opening part of one the most famous traditional pipa pieces, *The Ambush*.

Example 3.6: *The Ambush* (notated on the staff notation by the author)



Example 3.7: *The Points*, bar 1 to 6

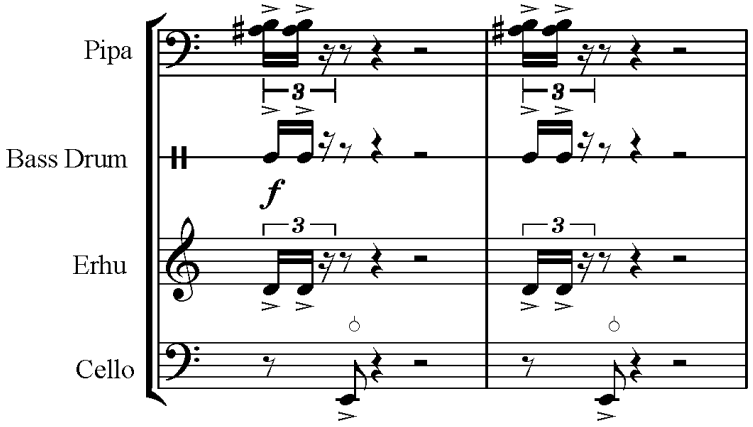


The *accelerando* rhythmic figures are prevalent in *wuchan*, the percussion-accompanimental part in Peking opera, which is often used to accompany a fighting scene in the opera as a way to catch the listener's attention and create a sense of intensity.

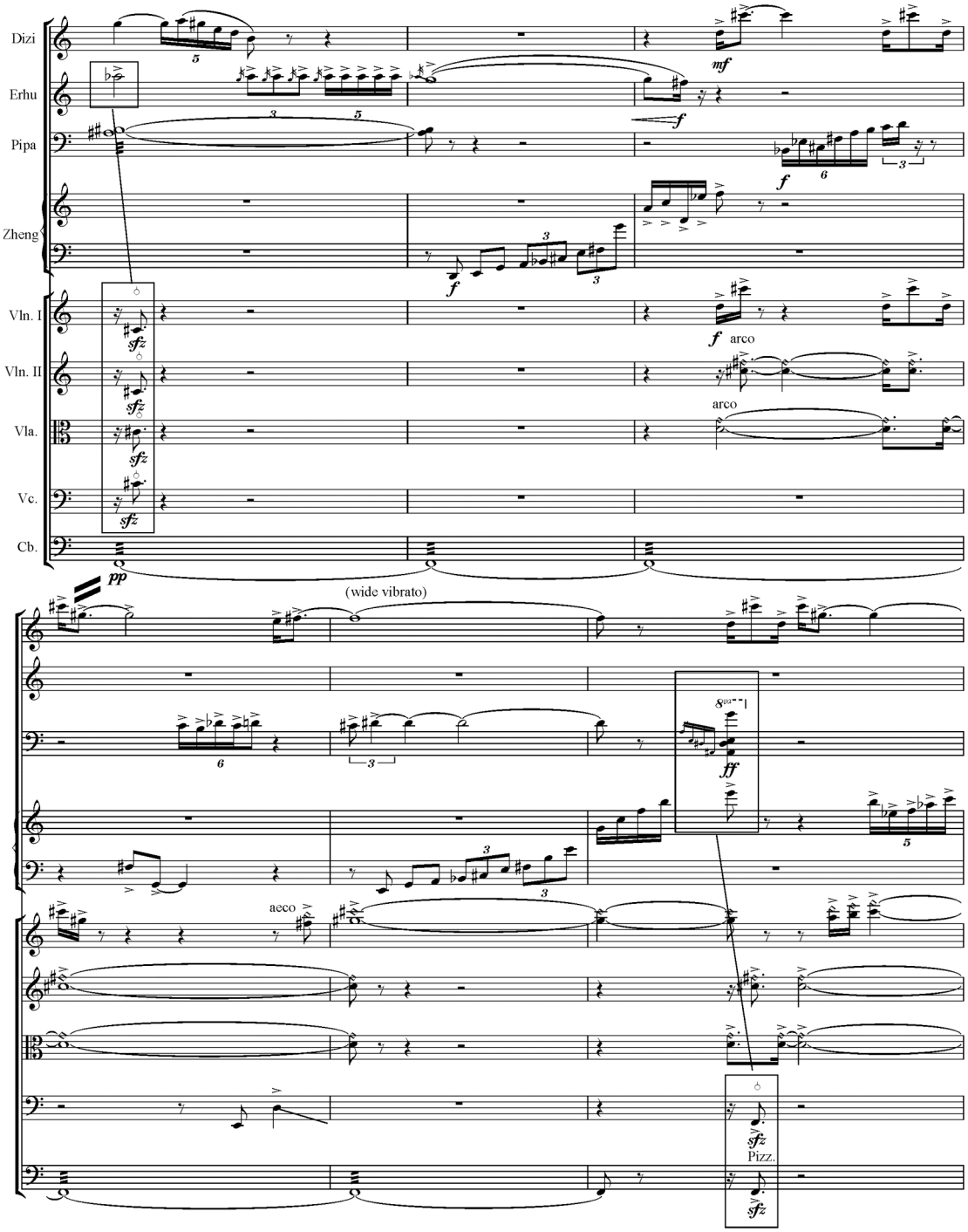
In *The Ambush*, the percussive *accelerando* figures perfectly build up the atmosphere at the beginning of the combat depicted in the piece, as represented by the pipa music.

The rhythmic figures are transformed into different ideas in Chen's other pieces, often with different instrumentation. Sometimes the percussive figures simply punctuate the end of the phrases as do the passages from *Chinese Fables* and *Ancient Dances* shown in Ex. 3.8 and Ex. 3.9; sometimes the figure builds tension, moving forward to a dramatic climax, as shown in Ex. 3.10 and 3.11.

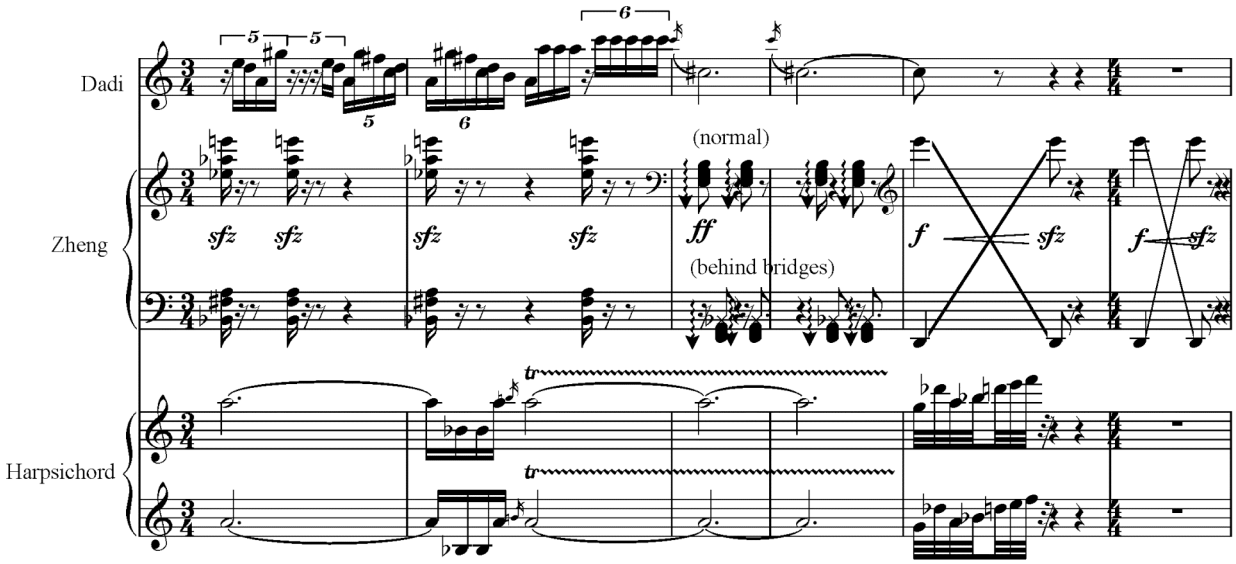
Example 3.8: ***Chinese Fables*, bar 17 to18**



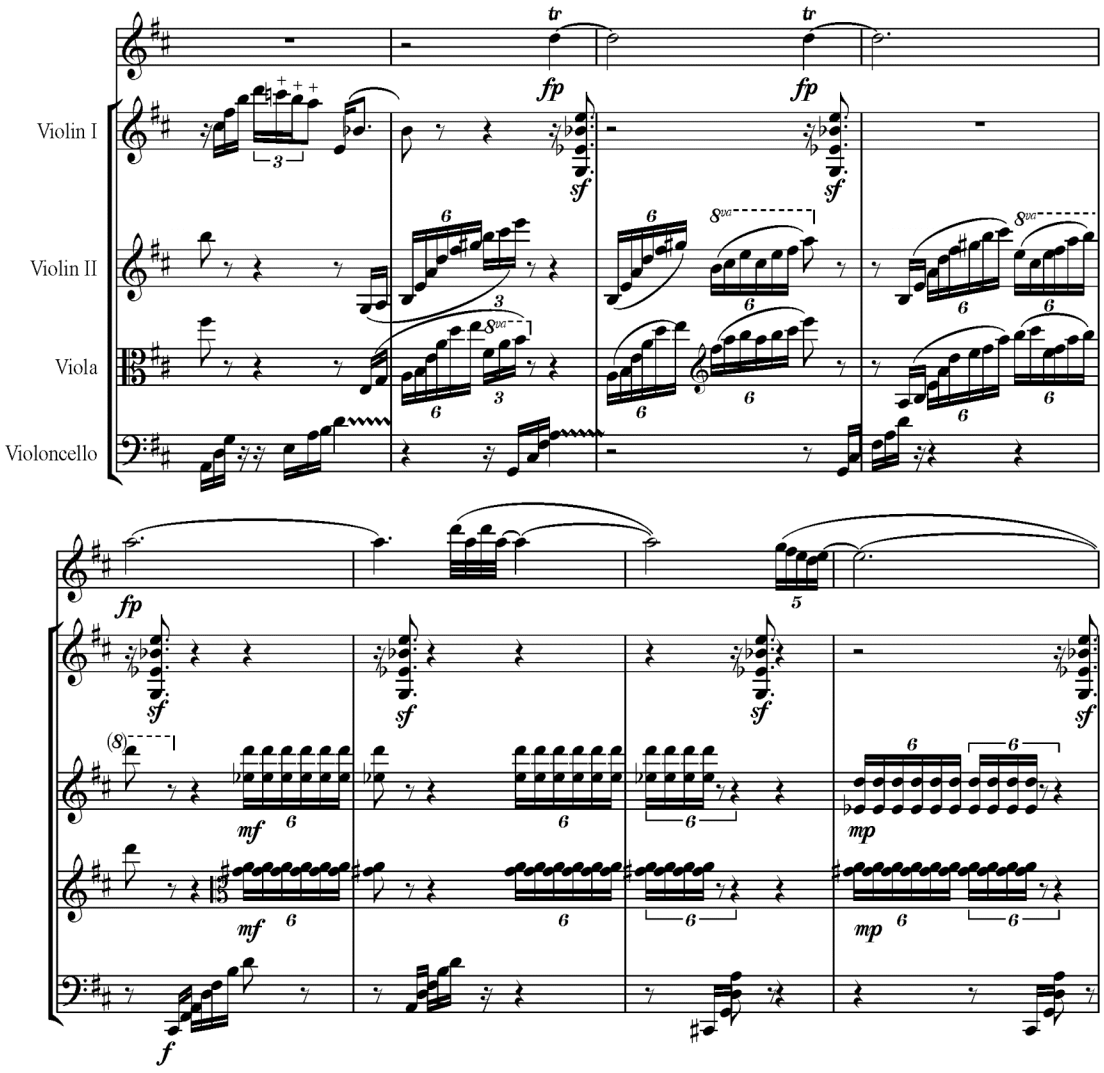
Example 3.9: *Ancient Dances*, II. "The Clay Figurines," bar 13 to 18 (boxes indicates the rhythm)



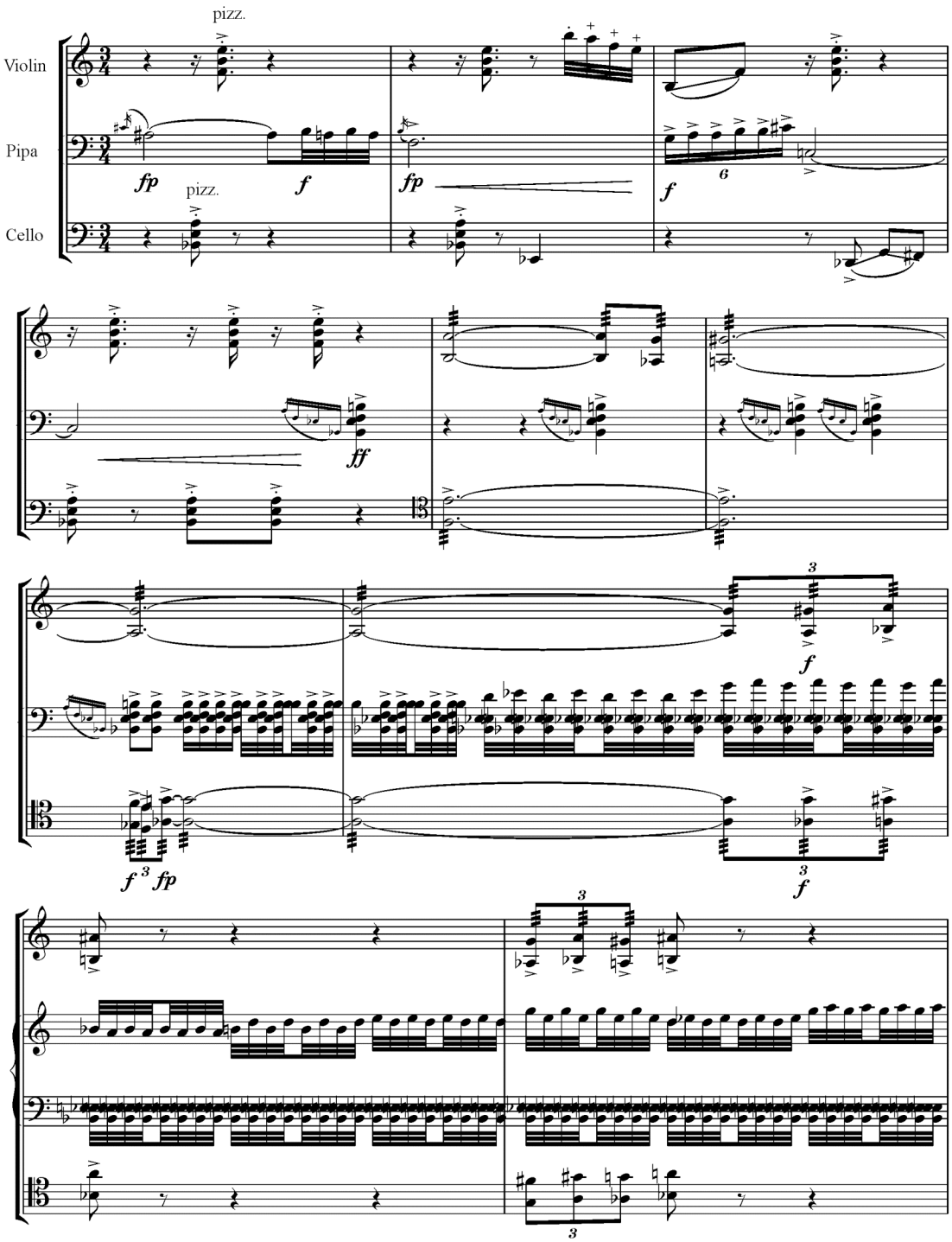
Example 3.10: *Song in Winter*, bar 72 to 77 (some symbols of the Chinese instrumental part are omitted or re-notated by the author)



Example 3.11: *Fiddle Suite*, Singing, bar 46 to 55



Example 3.12: *Ning*, bar 74 to 88 (some symbols of the pipa part are omitted)



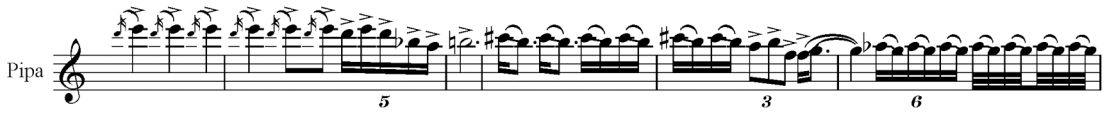
The similarity between examples 3.6 and 3.7, where the original idea comes from the drum music, is obvious. Ex. 3.8 and 3.9 show a similar idea, which is smaller units of the percussive figures, a short-long two beat pattern that punctuates the end of the phrase. When the idea is developed and transformed as shown in examples 3.10 to 3.12 , the repetitive pattern builds an ongoing motion up to a climax at the end. The musical idea transformed from the traditional one is ubiquitous in Chen's music.

The idea also shows the important relationship among the players in Chinese drum music. As we can see in the examples, there is always one instrument or group of instruments leading the repetitive figures with accelerando, like the zheng in example 3.10, with the other ones following and repeating the pattern. This is the same as in Chinese drum music where there is a lead drummer who always controls the pace and gives signals to the rest of the players. The accelerando figures presented in Chen's music do not necessarily have a narrative function as is the case with the traditional ones in *wuqu*[1] in Peking opera or in pipa music where they are used to dipict fighting sceneries. In addition to the figures are being abstracted and distributed in different instruments. Chen's percussive figures are used as materials to be developed in the music. Ex. 3.9 shows that when the percussive figures are used, similar rhythmic figures are also integrated, e.g., the syncopated rhythms in the dizi and strings, so that the figures are not merely used as an effect but also serve as a crucial element to the form. Also, the figures in the above examples are often used and echoed by another single line, which has the character of repeated notes from slow to fast, decorated with grace notes that reflect the Chinese operatic singing style. This kind of embellished line of vocal style shown in the

[1] See footnote 13 in Chapter 2.

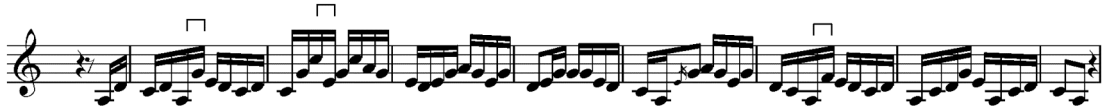
example is prevalent in Chen's works and perfectly matches the repetitive percussive figures.

Example 3.13: *Ning*, bar 89 to 95

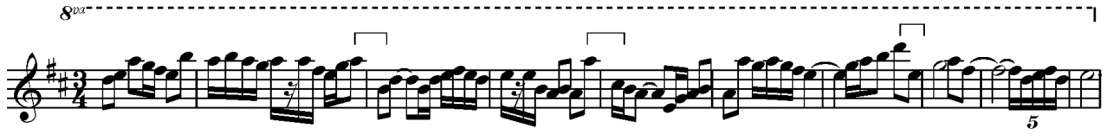


Another example of Chinese operatic style in Chen's music is the first movement of *Fiddle Suite* (see next example). The main melodic lines represent the *hsi-pi*[2] voice style in Peking Opera where the melodic lines often include the pitches of the open strings of jinhu (A and E) and emphasize great leaps such as seventh and sixth.

Example 3.14: Excerpt from the introduction of *hsi-pi yuan ban*[3], brackets show the great leaps in *hsi-pi* music



Example 3. 15: Great leaps that resemble *hsi-pi* music in *Fiddle Suite*, I. "Singing"



[2] *His-pi* is one of the two basic types of *pi-huang* style, which functions as melodic formulas that incorporate tunes used for both festive and serious occasions. Dolores Menstell Hsu, "Music Elements of Chinese Opera," *Oxford University Press*, 447.

[3] Yang yu yie, *Analysis of Peking operatic voice* (Chen Fong Uen Yi, 1990), 248.

Also in *Fiddle Suite*, the opening part of the jinhu of the third movement resembles in both timbre and register the function of the surna, a wind instrument in the accompanimental music of Peking Opera, which is played as the introduction in Chinese opera before all the instruments start to play the bustling part in the next section.

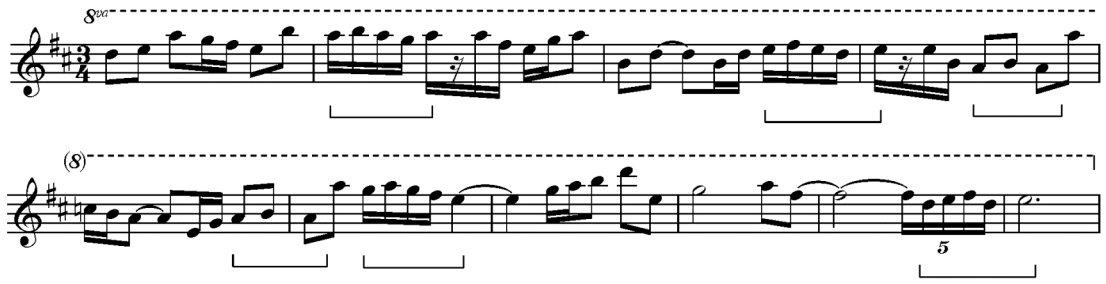
We have thus seen that Chen Yi uses musical elements that resemble Chinese traditional music, but that these materials are presented differently and with different media. The traditional figures found in Chen's music are abstracted and integrated into her musical language so that even though these materials connect listeners to certain types of Chinese traditional music, Chen's music still gives listeners a fresh feeling.

The Element of Idiosyncratic Instrumental Playing in Chen's Music

When Chen Yi composes folk-like materials as the main melodic lines, the development of the lines itself are very similar to that of the traditional ones, very ornamental, repetitive and spontaneous. This technique of *jiahua* (added notes) is typical of variation in Chinese music. *Jiahua* is made through an improvisatory process based on the skeleton of the tune. Adjacent notes of the tune can be added to circle around the skeletal melodies, depending on the player's school or style. The first movement of *Fiddle Suite*, "Singing," opens with a circuitous main melodic line based on the *shang* scale[4]which is an original melody of Chen Yi, treated with the feature of *jiahua*.

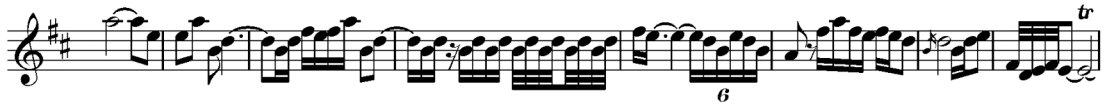
[4] emphasize the second note in a pentatonic scale, e.g., D in the original one, as tonic.

Example 3.16: *Fiddle Suite*, I. "Singing," bar 1 to 10



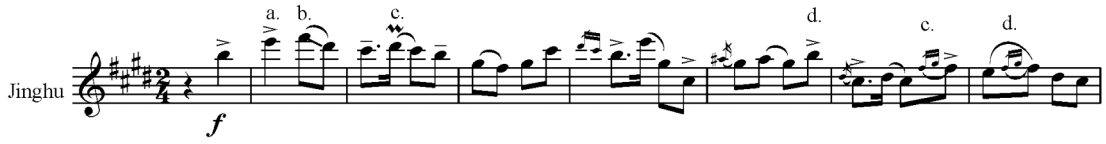
The up-and-down figures shown with brackets indicate the typical *jiahua* figures in the melody. Although *jiahua* figures are written out in the score, not improvised by the players as were the traditional ones, it seems that Chen Yi still tries to give performers more room to interpret their own solo passages, as the solo Chinese instrumental parts do not sound exactly as notated in the recording of the selected pieces. In addition, *jiahua* figures do not merely serve as decorative notes in this movement. Chen Yi turns the ornamentation of the main melody, the quintuplet at the end of the phrase, into another important motif which is gradually woven into a background texture in this piece (more details concerning texture will be discussed in the next chapter). Another version of *jiahua* appears in the main melody from bar 66 as a cadenza in the erhu toward the end.

Example 3.17: *Fiddle Suite*, bar 70 to 77



Besides adding decorative notes to the line, players can show their own style by adding different subtleties within even one single note through the technique of *jiahua*. These ideas can be found in the third movement, "Dancing" from *Fiddle Suite.* Chen Yi puts details in the jinhu's line that are based on the subtle typical erhu techniques.

Example 3.18: *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing," bar 1 to 8



In Ex. 3.18, the letters present the various elements of idiomatic erhu technique, according to Witzleben's categorization, in the beginning passage of jinhu part in *Fiddle Suite*. Figure a., refers to the example, is a rapid ascending sliding note from an indefinite pitch; figure b. is a glissando that usually spans the interval of a minor third; short trill c. produced by quickly playing a step above one or more times; left side note d. is played when there is a downward big leap.[5]

When Chen Yi includes Chinese instruments in her music, the idiomatic playing of individual instruments is always integrated with other materials. Though the selected works in the dissertation that include Chinese instruments are shorter in duration and smaller in instrumentation, idioms may come from some of the traditional pieces. For example, some of the techniques in the pipa solo *The Points* are reminiscent of the traditional masterpiece *The Ambush*, and string figures in the third movement, "Dancing," of *Fiddle Suite* are reminiscent of the grand jinghu concerto: *In the Deep of the Night*. Combining the idiosyncrasies of Chinese instruments such as musical figures and techniques is an important part of Chen's synthesis and shows Chen striving to maintain the traditional in her music. Although the traditional Chinese instrumental parts are

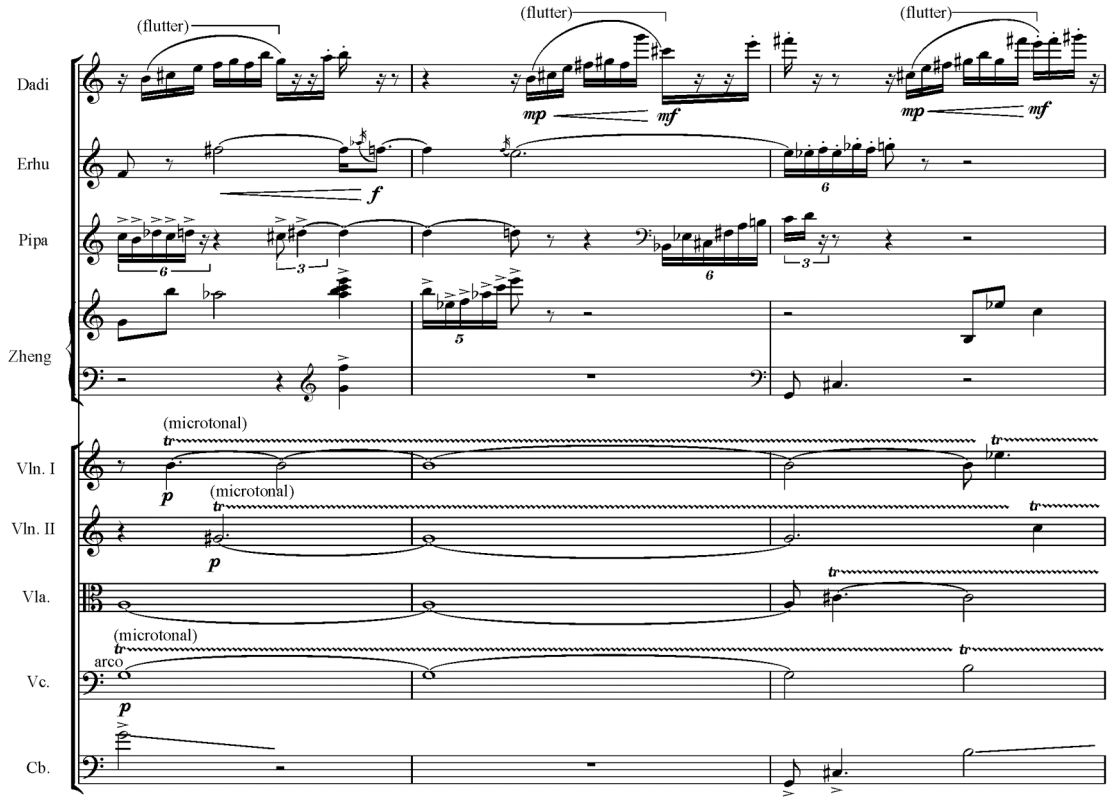
[5] J. Lawrence Witzleben categorizes types of traditional ornamental figures in erhu music in *Silk and Bamboo: Music in Shanghai* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 45.

notated in Western staff notation, the parts are still indicated with traditional symbols which show different requirements in the score, such as left hand and right hand techniques, register and what string is to be played. Moreover, as part of the synthetic musical process, Chen also applies these traditional techniques on Western instruments. As sounds resonate differently on different instruments, these traditional techniques used on Western instruments create unfamiliar sonorities to the listener. Though the materials are not new, using different media creates fresh sonic experiences for the listener.

The Element of Idiomatic Playing of Traditional Instrumental Style on Western Instruments

Traditional techniques used in Chen's music not only bring new colors to the music, they are also integrated as part of the structure in her works. In the second movement of *Fiddle Suite*, microtonal trills are played by the string quartet, which simulate the undulating effect on the erhu called *langyin* or "wave note," a special bowing technique of the erhu for long sustained notes. Furthermore, when the microtonal trill is employed and played by four string instruments together in the closest register, it creates a sound of cluster that becomes an important element of texture in the following section. The same idea can be found in Chen's *Ancient Beauty*, first movement, in bar 19 as well as the second movement from bar 36 to 40 where the mass of sound employed by microtonal trill creates a remote background texture.

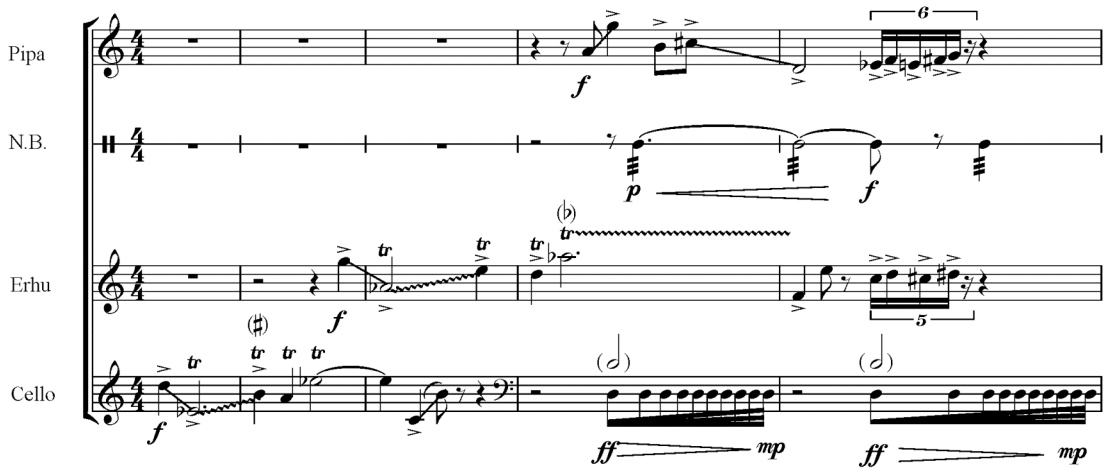
Example 3.19: *Ancient Beauty*, II. "Clay Figurines," bar 37 to 39[6]



In *Chinese Fables*, glissando with trill is applied in the cello, which originally comes from the traditional erhu pieces such as in "Racing Horse" (*zhan ma ban tong*) where the technique is often used to mimic the sound of a horse scream. However, when the technique is used in *Chinese Fables*, the figures become part of the musical ideas rather than for the sake of imitating the sound from animals. The up-and-down gestures played with trill perfectly match the main musical idea in this piece in which the intervals of the second form saw-like shapes.

[6] See Appendix, Ex. 6.1 for Chen's original score and descriptions of zheng's techniques

Example 3.20: *Chinese Fables*, III. The Snipe and the Clam, bar 43 to 47



The last two bars of the cello part in the example shows the technique of striking the body of the cello using two palms. The same idea can be found and integrated with pipa in bar 34 in this piece. The technique can be seen in traditional pipa pieces such as "A Rose For Me"[7] where the player is asked to tap the body of the instrument with indications for left hand and right hand. However, unlike the way that the pipa, in "A Rose For Me," is turned into a percussion instrument rhythmically accompanying the tune, Chen's application of the technique in the cello is more of an annex of timbre to the music rather than an attempt to transmit a certain rhythmical idea through the technique. We can see the idiosyncrasies of certain Chinese instruments applied to the Western instruments in some of the passages by observing their music gestures, e.g., bar 44 in the first movement of *Fiddle Suite*, the short sounds played pizzicato and the rapid arpeggio of chords in the strings resembling the strums of plucked instruments.

[7] Revised by Wang fan-di, *Collection of Pipa (琵琶曲選)*, "*A Rose For Me*" (Ren Ming Yin Uei)(人民音樂出版社), 37.

From the unconventional techniques used in Chen's pieces, such as glissando after pizzicato and accompanied by instrument with wide vibrato in *Ancient Beauty*, violin and viola playing tremolo with wide vibrato in *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting," and all the examples shown above, we can see that these materials of idiosyncratic music gestures and unconventional techniques are carefully orchestrated and transformed. Moreover, in Chen's music, certain gestures show an indefinite quality, typical of Asian music in general, such as slow glissando and wide vibrato. Absolute control is difficult when performing some of these techniques and the results can be different each time. For example, employing a wide vibrato cannot always produce the same width of intervals and same speed of undulations. Slow glissando to the highest pitches cannot produce the same highest pitch every time and instruments can't play exactly the same speed of slow glissando together. So the quality of uncertainty when these techniques are used makes the music mercurial and also gives players more leeway for personal interpretation.

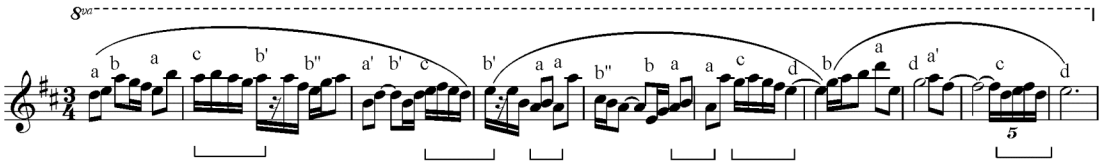
Figurative Development in Phrases

Chinese traditional music has the quality of uncertainty partly due to its original notation in *gongche* notation which has only a skeletal melody written out with no details included. Therefore, the interpretations are made with different schools of styles of players and are varied from generation to generation so that no precise notation is left. Perhaps because improvisation is so important when the player is given only a skeletal melody, the phrase divisions of Chinese music are considered less symmetrical and

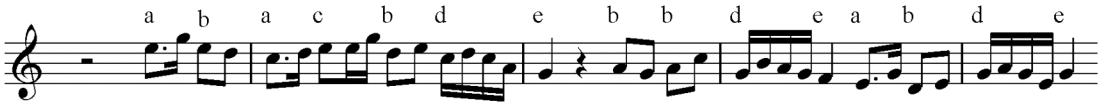
regular. Therefore of Chinese music have avoided discussing its generative structure and motives[8].

Although Chen's music has the same improvisatory quality as Chinese traditional music, Chen's music is always precisely notated with details included; thus for the most part, it presents her own rendition. In analyzing her music, we see that it has the same semi-improvisatory repetitive figures, appearing differently each time. Example 3.21 shows the flowing melody of the violin in *Fiddle Suite*. Each letter presents a rhythmic figure that is randomly mixed with other rhythmic figures. Phrases containing the rhythmic figures marked with brackets in example 3.21 are blurred due to the occurrence of circuitous figures followed by a rest, giving a sense of a temporal ending. Similar traits can be found in example 3.22, an excerpt from a passage of *qinqian* Chinese operatic singing.

Example 3.21: *Fiddle Suite*, bar 1 to 6



Example 3.22: Music excerpt from Xiao bin, qinqian music



[8] Myers, *The Way of the Pipa*, 47.

Jonathan Stock[9] has described the cadence pattern in Liu Tianhua[10]'s *erhu* solo piece, in his words, as "organically" related when the similar materials do not repeat exactly, as distinguished from "motivically" related. It may be suitable to describe Chen's phrase segments as organically related where each unit repeats with different subtleties in a linear series. As in Chinese traditional music, some of the materials that resemble Chinese music in Chen's pieces are developed in a more improvisatory way based on a skeletal melody through repetition and variation of shorter phrases. In the third movement of *Fiddle Suite*, the main melody played by jinghu (Figure 3.2) is varied each time (Figure 3.3 and 3.4). Brackets in the examples show the series of related material repeated and varied for each entry of the restatement in jinghu's part.

Figure 3.2: *Fiddle Suite* III., Dancing, bar 1 to 8

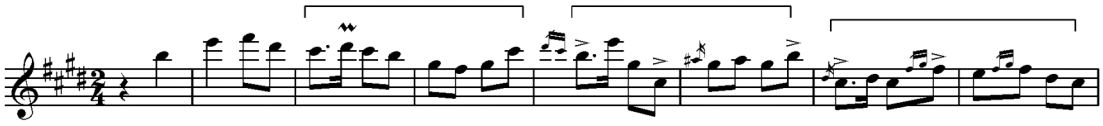


Figure 3.3: *Fiddle Suite* III., Dancing, bar 40 to 46

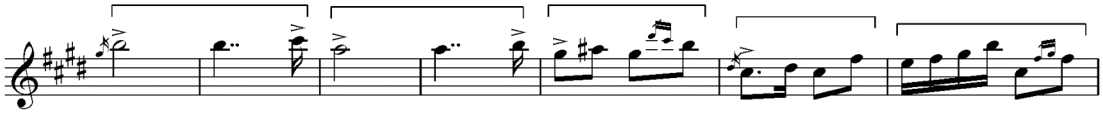
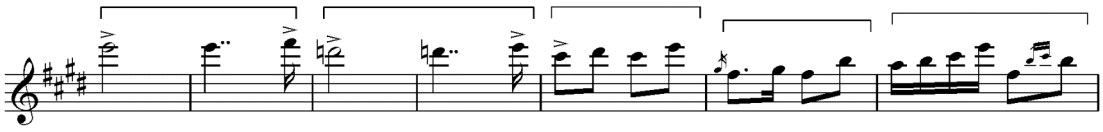


Figure 3.4: *Fiddle Suite* III., Dancing, bar 110 to 117

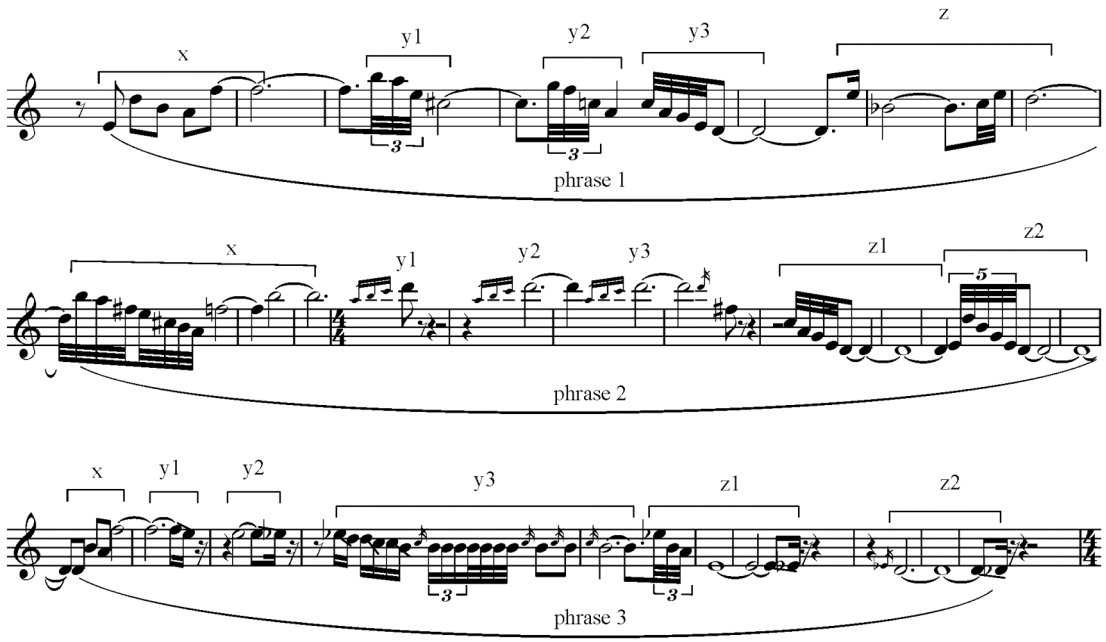


[9] Jonathan Stock, "Contemporary recital solos for the Chinese two-stringed fiddle *erhu*", 64- 65

[10] The first musician to write series of *erhu* solo pieces

Likewise, the repetitive short units varied linearly can be seen in Figure 3.5 from the dadi's line in *Song in Winter*. Each slur in the example shows the division of phrases; brackets show smaller units of figures. Letter x shows the figure emphasizing the pitch F; y shows the sequence that links x and z; z represents the end of the phrase, emphasizing the pitch D. Not only do the figures develop in a repetitive way, the phrase repeats itself by producing the same groups of components, though the components in each phrase are not exactly the same in pitch and rhythm, but similar in gesture.

Figure 3.5: *Song in Winter*, bar 1 to 27

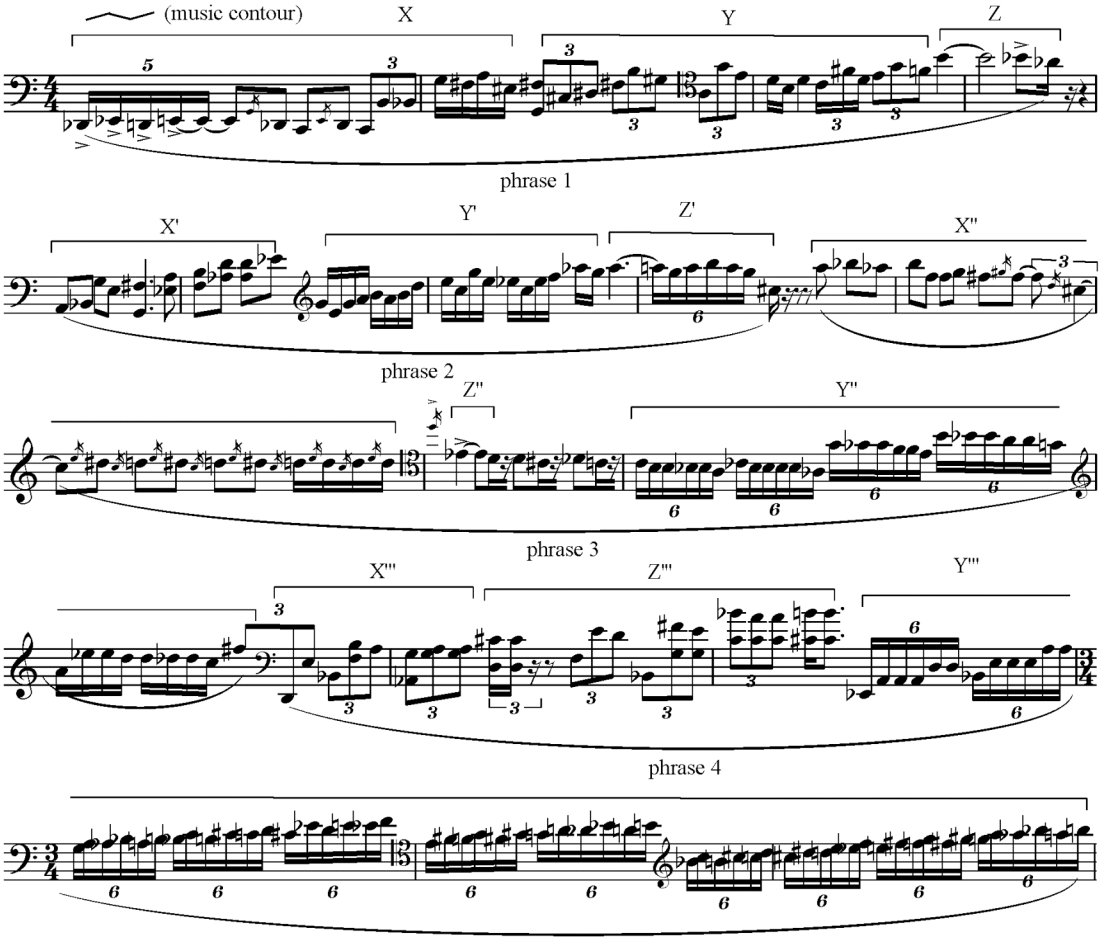


The same sort of self-consistency can be discovered in the next example, from *Ning*. One big difference between *Ning* and *Song in Winter* is that there is not much pitch emphasis but rather intervals such as the major seventh and augmented fourth. Letter x shows the up and down music contour; y shows consecutive upward figures that encompass a

partial pentatonic scale; z shows the tied figure and the emphasis of the interval of the seventh.

Notice that although the components are reordered in phrase 2 and 3 in Figure 3.6, the structure of the phrases, composed of repetitive materials, is similar to the structure in *Song in Winter* in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.6: *Ning*, bar 1 to 18



The sense of linear continuation in Chen's music is very similar to that of Chinese traditional music and the continuation is often made by the reiteration of the same units with different variation. Music created from repetitive small units varied each time is like the metamorphosed presentation in a kaleidoscope of similar small objects. Although the form of the smaller components inside the phrases seems ever-changing, the repetition of the units expand and construct a balanced larger frame which remains unchanged.

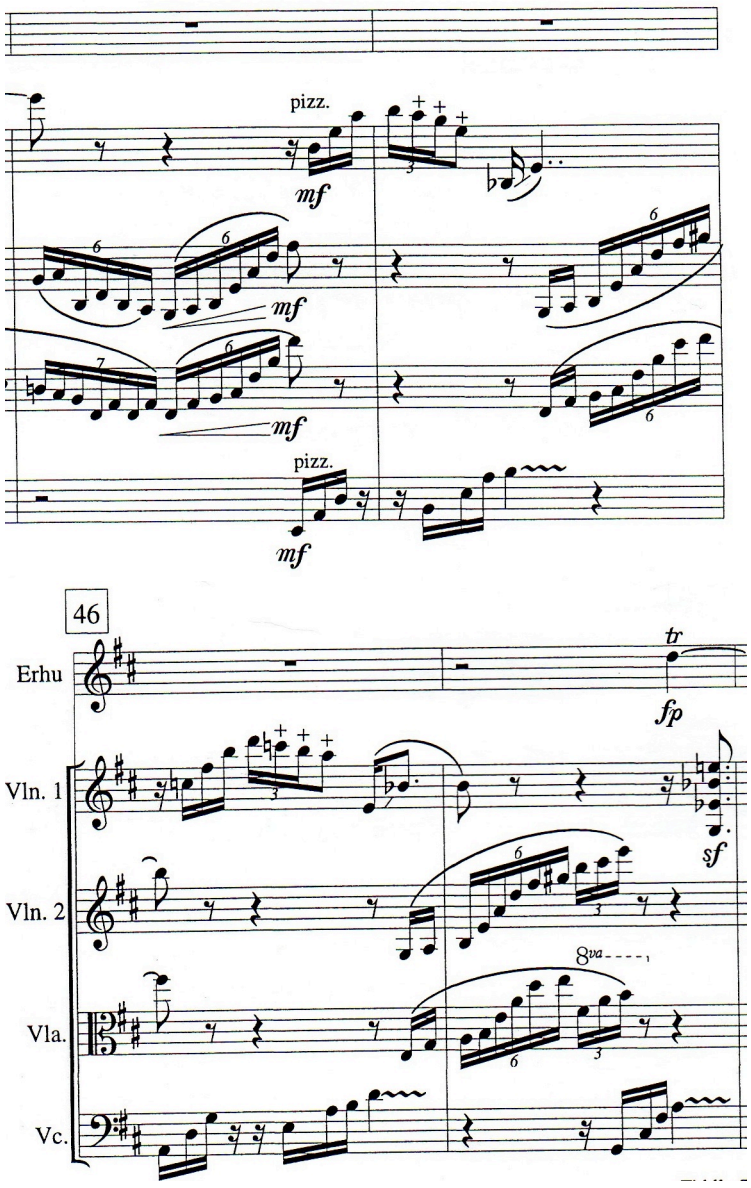
CHAPTER FOUR

APPROACH TO TIMBRE AND TEXTURE IN THE SELECTED PIECES

Approach to Timbre

Perhaps due to the lack of pitch materials in Chinese music, timbre has played an important role in Chinese traditional music. However, the concept of timbre in Chinese traditional music is still associated with pitch and is not treated as the effect of color in music as it is used by contemporary Western composers. Chen Yi studied composition techniques at Columbia with Chou-wen Chung who learned the concept of timbre in 20th century music from Edgard Varèse and integrated the ideas into his music. We can see the influence of Varèse's treatment of percussion instruments to produce colors in the orchestra reflected in Chou and Chen's music. However, Chen's desire to strive for unique sounds is mostly inspired by traditional techniques of Chinese instruments in order to broaden the ways of playing Western instruments to create similar effects. In the first movement of *Fiddle Suite*, a sound effect resembling the Chinese plucked instruments in the accompanimental part in the Chinese orchestra is shown with violin and cello in bar 44 to 46, as the short resonance played pizzicato in a relatively higher register with strings in the section (Ex. 4.1).

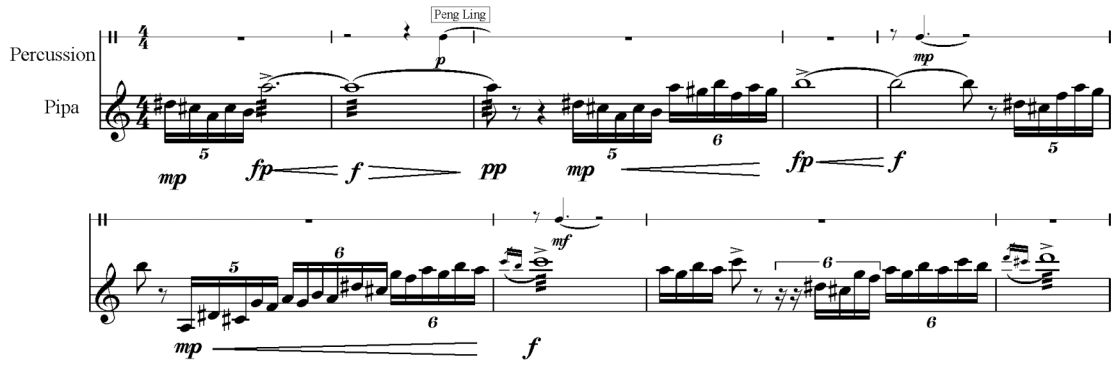
Example 4.1: Sound effects resemble the Chinese plucked instruments in *Fiddle Suite*, "Singing"



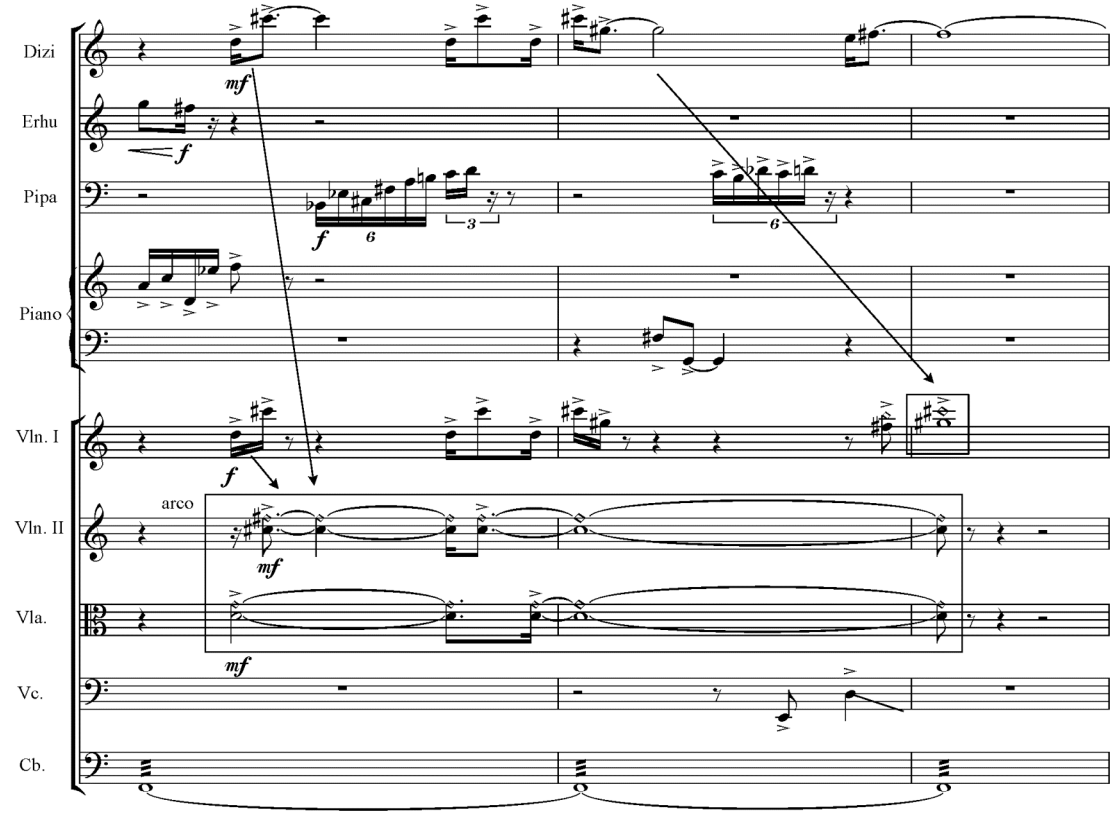
In *Ancient Dances*, the pipa produces percussion sounds, and echoes and colors the other percussion part as a duo. The pipa's percussive techniques inspired from traditional pieces can be seen in *Ancient Dance*, such as plucking while dampening the string,

tapping the body of the instrument with the fingernails, tapping the body of the instrument with the palms, and pulling the strings (like the Bartók pizz.). These techniques produce non-pitch materials which have been used in traditional pipa pieces to dipict military scenes as some of the sounds can be used to simulate the sounds of swords or weapons. Unlike the traditional way of using these non-pitch percussive sounds, the non-pitch materials in the pipa part in *Ancient Dance*s do not associate with a military scene or for the purpose of simulating certain sounds. The percussive sounds produced by the pipa are used as elements of timbres, reinforced by the percussion part. The two parts sometimes draw certain timbres from the other instruments; sometimes the instruments echo and imitate each other in sounds and musical gesture, balancing each other. In order to blend the timbres, Chen makes analogy of sounds. In *Ancient Dances*, Introduction, from bar 1 to bar 23, Chen uses the relatively high pitched instrument peng ling to extend the highest pitches at the end of the pipa's phrases. Another example of the timbral extension not only sustains a certain sound, it also creates a textural support in the background, as we can see in the second movement of *The Ancient Beauty*.

Example 4.2: Percussion extends the pipa's notes in the high register, bar 1 to 9



Example 4.3: The timbral extension in *The Ancient Beauty*, II. "The Clay Figurines," bar 15 to 17



Not only does timbre serve as a "glue" to extend certain sounds as we have seen in the example, it also helps to define formal structures in *Chinese Fables*, III. Since the musical lines break into fragments and the musical gestures continuously shape the up- and down contours with no pitch emphases, registral gesture and timbre become the main focus and clues for development in this movement. Section A, beginning in measure 1 to 9, and A', beginning in measure 22, show the same ordering of sounds in relatively high and low registers (indicated with capital H and L, representing high and low in Ex. 4.4).

Example 4.4: Section A, bar 1 to 7

nutsbell (H.)
m.1 - 8----------

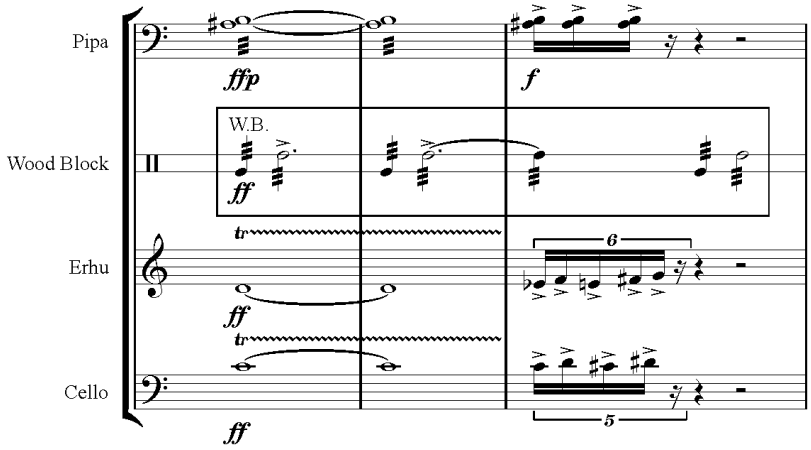
pipa + erhu (H.) pipa + cello (L.) pipa + erhu (H.)
m.3------- m.5------- m.6 - 7----------

cello (L.) cello (L.)
m.3------ m.7----

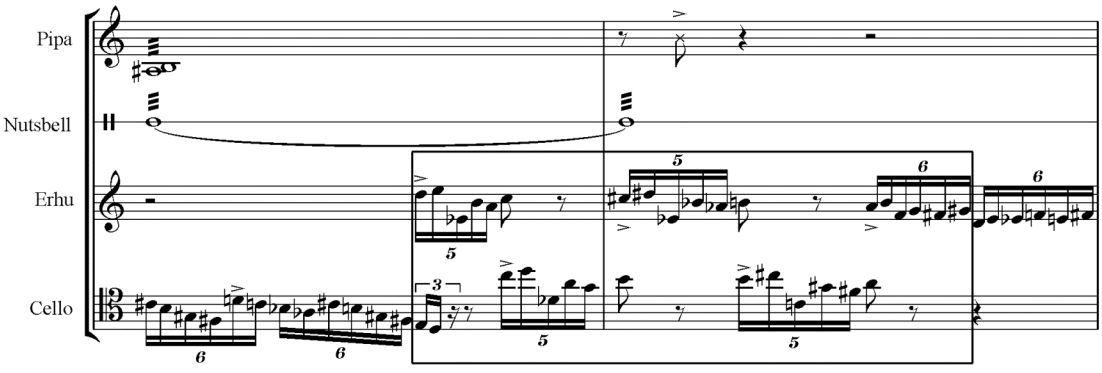
Beginning in measure 11, we can see pipa, erhu and cello have similar musical gestures, which produces an effect similar to sound mass, which in turn make the high and low sounds in the wood block stand out (Ex. 4.5). Beginning in measure 31 we can see the transformations of the original idea from measure 11; the erhu and cello's up-and-down figures now represent the function of wood block, showing another version of low and high sounds with different musical gestures (Ex. 4.6). The same idea carries over to the section beginning in measure 38 with pipa and erhu (Ex. 4.7). Although the musical gestures are transformed in different ways, with the same registral organization, it unifies

the ideas as a whole in this movement. In addition, the percussive sounds in the pipa from measure 32 to 34 (Ex. 4.9) is one of the examples of timbral transformation of the percussive sounds in the cello's part, which first appears from bar 3 to 5 (Ex. 4.8). This is one of the important elements noticeable by their timbre in this piece.

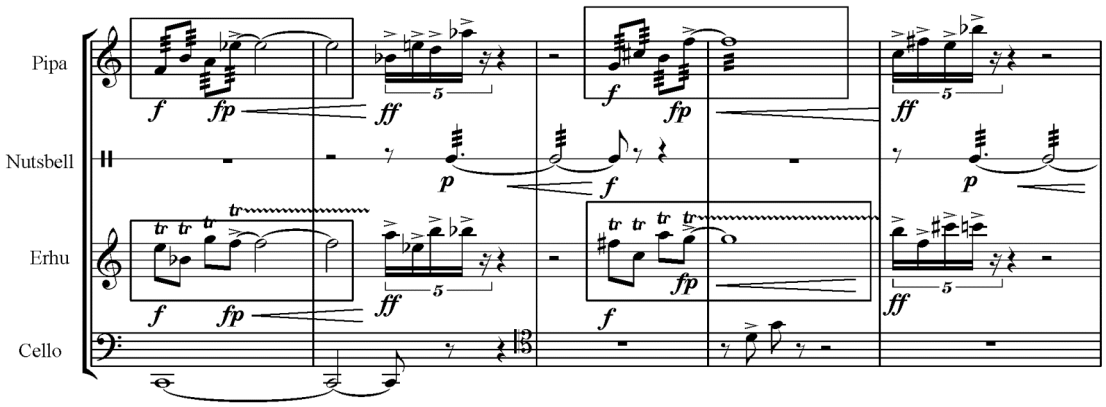
Example 4.5: Original musical gesture in wood block, *Chinese Fables*, bar 11 to 13



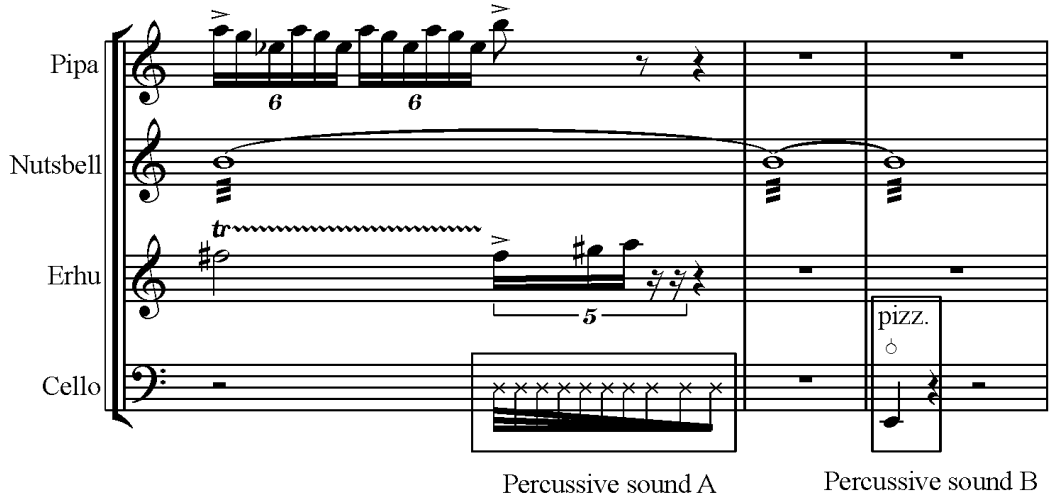
Example 4.6: Transformed figures in *Chinese Fable*, bar 31 and 32



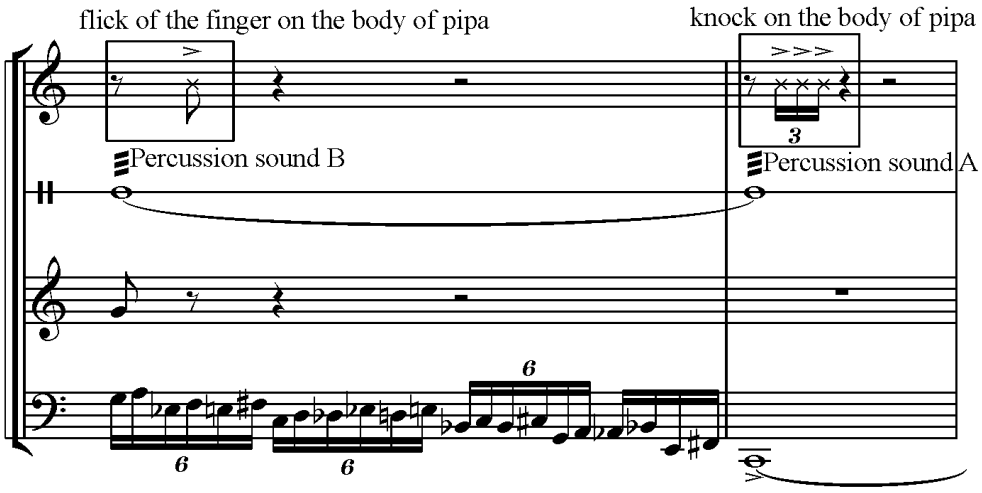
Example 4.7: Transformed figures in *Chinese Fables*, bar 38 to 42



Example 4.8: Percussive sounds in *Chinese Fable*, bar 3 to 5



Example 4.9: Transformed percussive sounds in *Chinese Fable,* bar 33 and 34

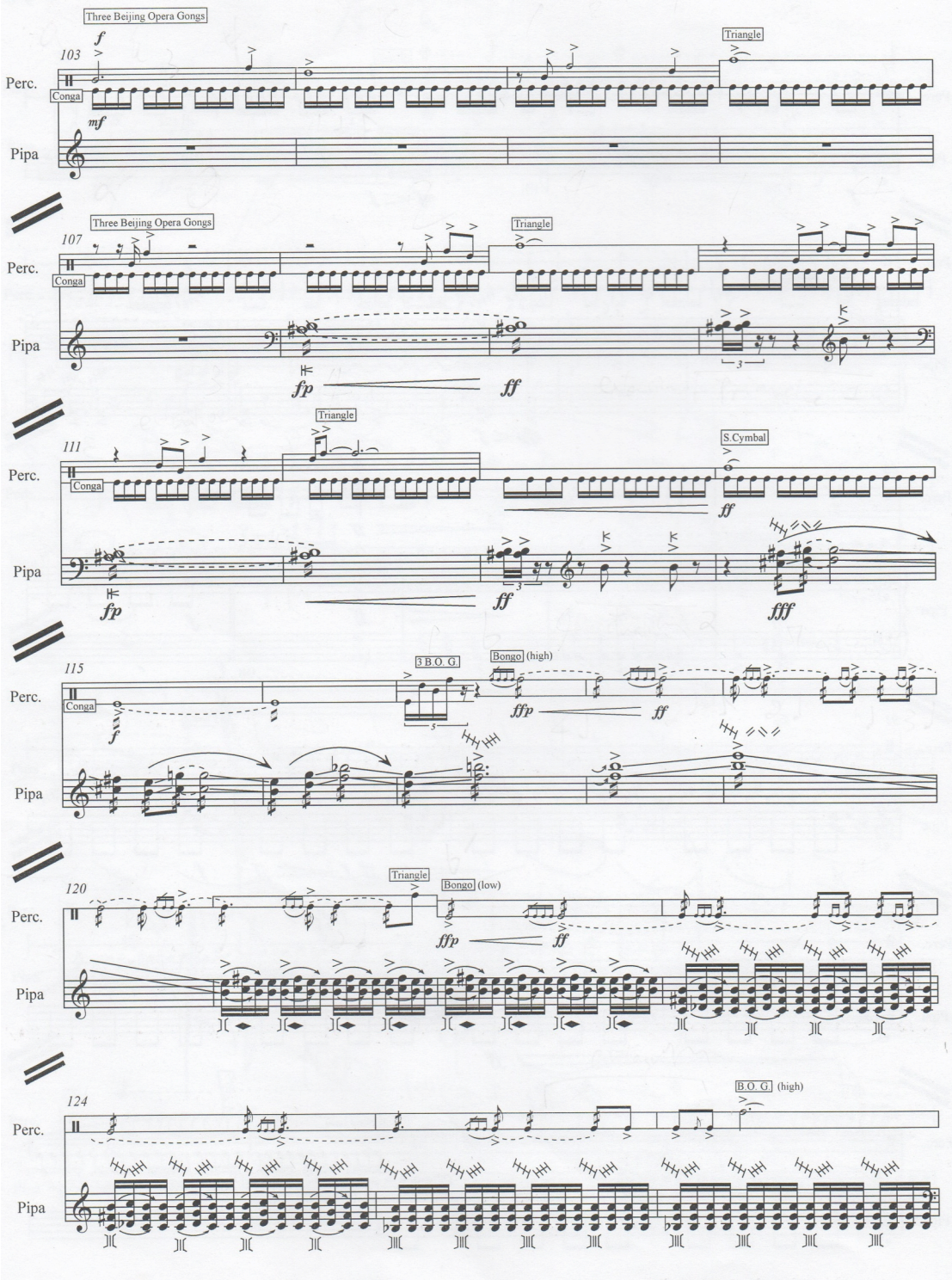


The organization of pitch, relative pitch and indefinite pitch materials can be seen in Chen's *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering." Beginning in measure 103, the percussion section includes the instruments of indefinite pitches such as sizzle cymbal, nao bo, triangle and Japanese high woodblock; and relative pitches such as bongos, two congas and three Beijing Opera gongs. Of these percussion instruments we can distinguish the sonic layers of relatively high, middle and low with the same timbre, echoed by the pipa with relatively high percussive sounds (indicated with traditional symbol k, produced by plucking the string with the index finger while at the same time damping the string by the fingernail of the thumb) and relatively low sounds, played with the technique of *jiao xian*, crossing the strings first appeared in bar 108. These are combined with pitched materials, such as chords bending back and forth in continually moving pitch. The idea of organizing different kinds of percussive sounds in this movement may be influenced by Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*, which used percussion instruments of definite and indefinite

pitch along with the moving pitches of sirens.[1] Chen focuses more on the unique percussive sounds the pipa can produce, echoed by percussion, giving the two equally important roles.

[1] Sidney Finkelstein's notes on the liner of the first recording of Varèse, *Ionisation*, EMS 401

Example 4.10: Relative and indefinite pitch of percussive sounds in *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering"[2]



[2] See Appendix for the descriptions of pipa techniques.

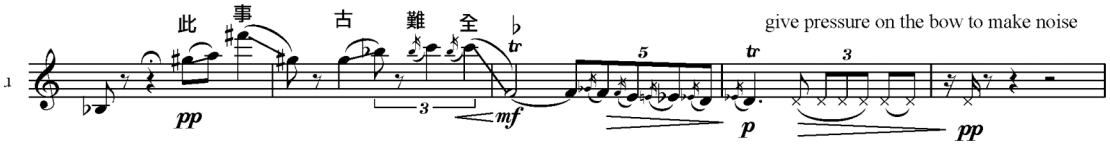
Chen's penchant for Chinese percussion instruments can be seen in *Ancient Dances,* as well as her other pieces. The selection of peng ling, nao bo and Beijing Opera gongs not only presents unique timbres in the music; the techniques of playing these traditional instruments are thus also preserved in her pieces. Beginning in measure 55 to 69, traditional techniques of nao bo are applied, such as rubbing, scrubbing and muffling to produce different timbres in the background. Moreover, Chen's innovation in producing new sounds with percussion instruments can be observed in *Chinese Fable*s, I, where the bass drum part is indicated as using a bunch of bamboo clappers to strike on the membrane; in *Ancient Dance*, "Wondering," the percussion player is directed to use a triangle beater to scratch on the sizzle cymbal.

We have seen the examples above showing Chen Yi's efforts to preserve the sounds produced by the traditional techniques, as well as her ability to create novel sounds with extended techniques. Chen Yi also applies timbre to present human expressions in her music. In *Ning*, Chen imagines the human expressions when facing the cruelty of the war, such as the imitation of crying, sighing and gasping, conveyed by the sounds of string instruments and pipa. We can see the examples of extended techniques being used to present feelings of sorrow, such as giving pressure with the bow to make noise, glissando on the frets from highest to lowest, bending of the pitches, etc. In a radio interview, Chen Yi highlighted the instrumental techniques she uses to describe the battle scene, such as the vibrato in high register to imitate the sound of crying on the violin and

the figures of big jumps and skips in the cello.[3] In addition, Chinese folk song is masked and distorted by being fragmented, placed in different registers, and played with artificial harmonics, creating a different sonic texture, which becomes a metaphor for the aftermath of the war.

Another human expression presented by timbral effects played with extended techniques can be found in *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting." Zhonghu transforms the reciting voice into noisy sounds at the end of the phrase when the part "recites" the lines of the poem, "People have their griefs and joys, their togetherness and separation, The moon its dark and clear times, its roundings and wanings."[4]. In *Fiddle Suite,* Chen uses the same noisy sound made by bow pressure in *Ning* to transform the timbre in order to present the change of emotion, now expressing the feeling of sorrow.

Example 4.11: *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting," Bar 75 to 79



Approach to Texture:
Influences of Chinese traditional music in Chen's musical texture

Besides timbre, another important element of Chen's synthetic process combining East and West is musical texture. The sonic fabric fuses together the epitome of heterophony from the East and the sound mass from the West. She balances her own

[3] Piñeiro, "Interview."
[4] Translated from the Chinese by Burton Watson, *Selected Poems of Su Tung-p'o* (Boston: Copper Canyon Press, 1994), 67.

musical abstraction with the inspiration of Chinese aesthetics. One of the influences in Chen Yi's music is the heterophony inherent in Chinese music. Although the term heterophony is defined differently by Western scholars, in general, it is described as different parts playing the same skeletal melody at the same time with each part having its own variation on melody or rhythm.[5] The texture of heterophony in Chinese music is perhaps created by the collaboration of a group of players who play the same melody together based upon a prior convention but with slight variations that depend on different player's interpretations on their various instruments. Although there is no room for players to make their own arrangements in Chen's pieces with their more detailed notation, we can still see in the musical texture the same characteristic quality of the traditional style.

Most of the selected pieces by Chen discussed here are small instrumental ensemble pieces resembling the instrumentation of Jiangnan Sizhu, a small ensemble featuring strings and relatively soft wind instruments from the Jiangnan region.[6] As Jiangnan Sizhu pieces are arranged by groups of players instead of individual persons, the interaction among players is a factor of the distinct texture. Witzleben mentions the musical texture resulting from the intuitive communication developed by a group of musicians playing together over a long period of time.[7] Two players should alternate the density of the music played. In other words, if one is playing the denser and more complex part, the other should then in response be playing a sparser part of the melody.

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[5] J. Lawrence Witzleben, *Silk and Bamboo, Music in Shanghai: The Jiangnan Sizhu Instrumental Ensemble Tradition* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 104.
[6] Witzleben, *Silk and Bamboo, Music in Shanghai*, 4.
[7] Ibid., 107.

Of the selected pieces of Chen Yi, this same pairing of texture can be observed. We can see the sense of a clear alternation of emphases on instruments in *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering." The first section presents the pipa and percussion parts imitating each other with short phrases. Beginning in measure 90, the pipa has a longer section by itself, with dense harmonies, strummed intensely with a strong dynamic, contrasting with the percussion part with only one sustained single note in the background. At bar 99 the percussion part starts to take over the pipa's part by adding another layer in high register with its rapid sixteenth notes in the lower register. The pipa, in response, then plays sustained notes in a sparse texture. The focus of the role nicely shifts in this section with the percussion part having the distinctive sounds in the high register but still with the low notes as a reference to the previous musical idea.

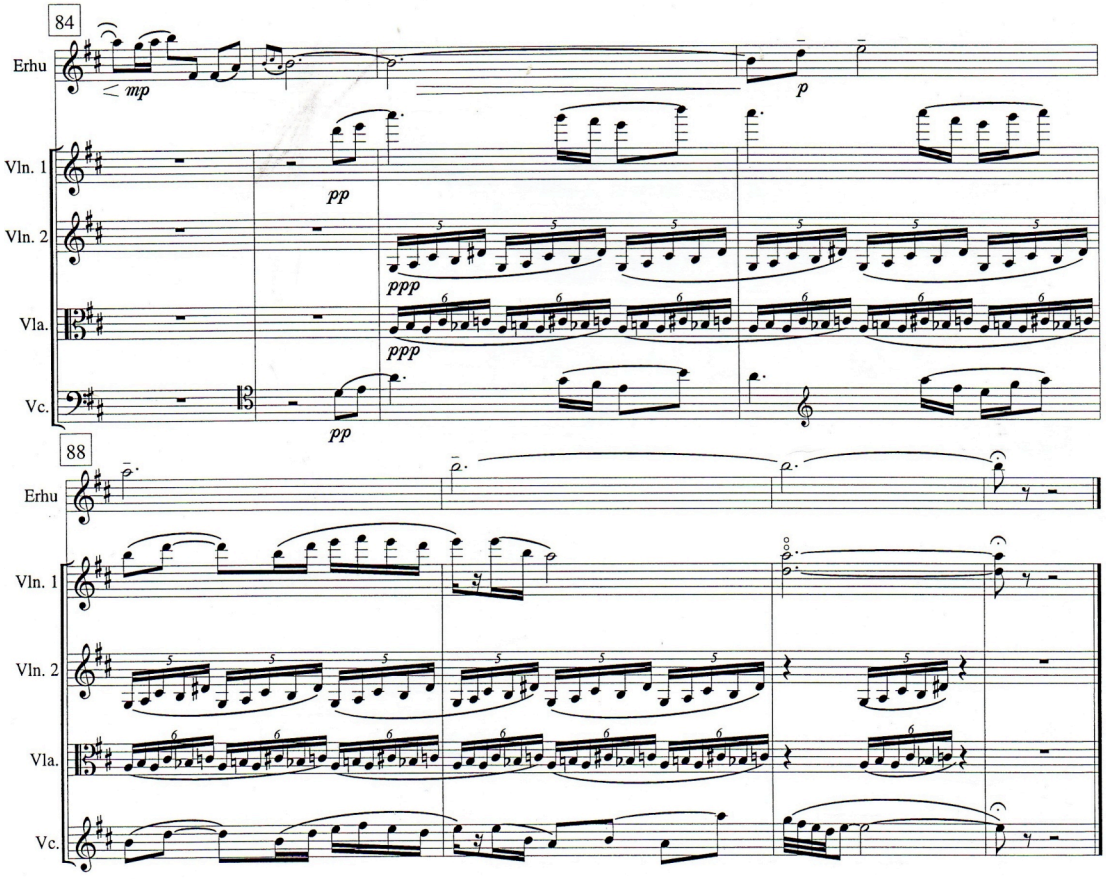
The same phenomenon can be observed in groups of players of more than two in the piece *The Ancient Beauty* where the accompanimental parts never overpower the ornamental leading part with their thin and sparse texture arranged in a higher register.

Qizhou in *Fiddle Suite* and *Ning*

The style of *qizhou* is another distinct characteristic in texture of Chinese traditional music embodied in Chen's music: the playing together in unison or in octaves on the same melody. Slightly different from the definition of *tutti* in Western music, the style of *qizhou* is not necessarily playing the parts in the same register with exact notes of melodies. *Qizhou* is very prevalent in Chinese ensemble pieces although the style and the

combination can be different depending on the regions and types of ensembles.[8] The style of *qizhou* is seen in many places in Chen Yi's *Fiddle Suite*. However, the melody played together by different instruments is always placed in two octaves apart as we can see in the example.

Example 4.12: *Qizhou* in *Fiddle Suite*, I. "Singing"

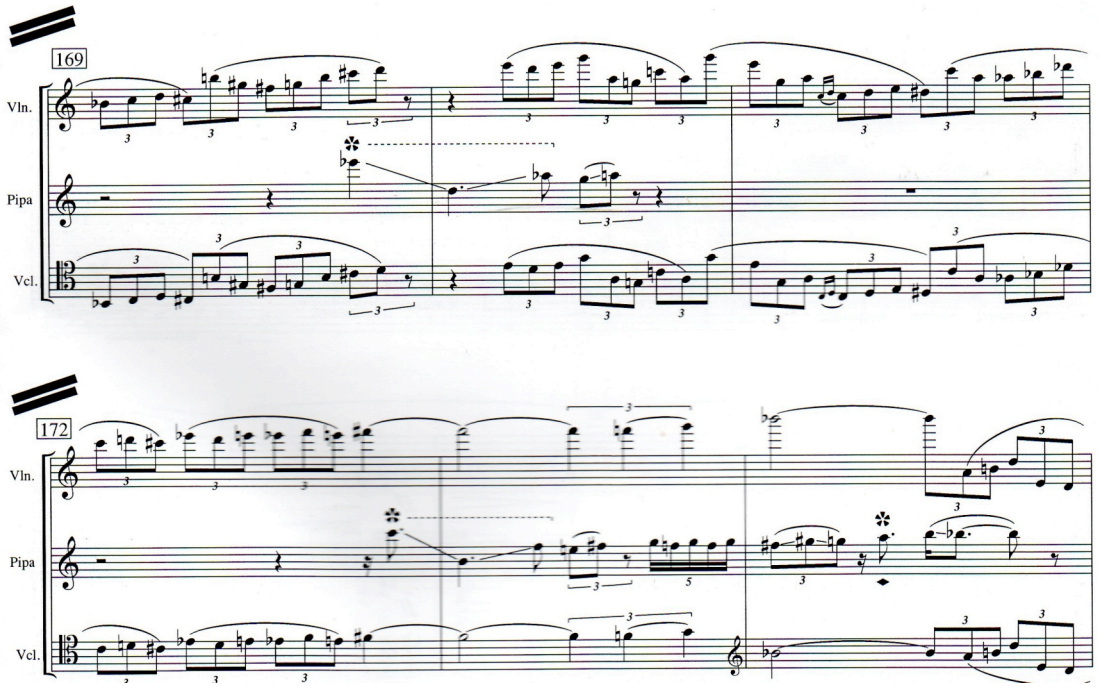


Beginning in bar 168 to 180 in *Ning*, *qizhou* takes place in the outer lines two octaves apart, creating a hollow effect while the middle voice stands out with a different

[8] Ibid., 109.

musical gesture inside the texture created by outer voices. This is different from a traditional style of *qizhou,* which is often used to emphasize the return of the main tune and is used in the climax section in turns, materials in this passage serving as background.

Example 4.13: *Qizhou* in *Ning*, bar 169 to 174

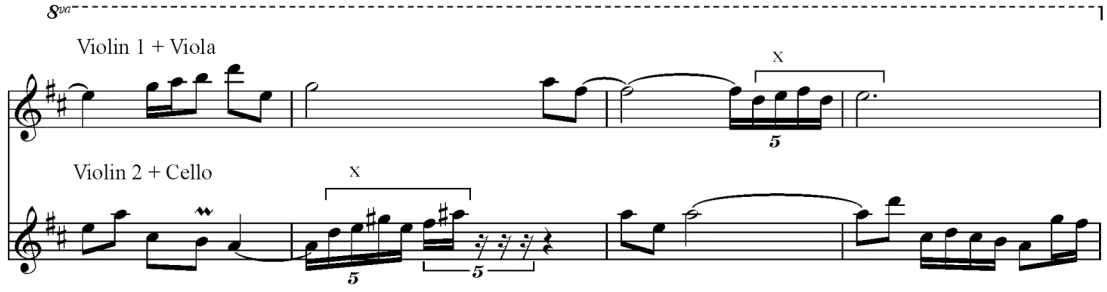


Collage of textures in *Fiddle Suite*

Chen Yi's musical synthesis of the East and West is a result of a mixture of different styles. Aside from the traits that can be found in Chinese music, other influences on her music from the 20th-century Western composers' musical texture cannot be overlooked. Chen absorbs and transforms influences from Bartók, Stravinsky and Ligeti, fuses these Western ideas with Chinese musical elements, and as a result, creates more gradations and contrasts in her music. The collage of the different styles of texture is

presented in *Fiddle Suite*, starting from the *qizhou* style itself and then gradually evolving to other coexisting textures of polyphony, sound mass and tone cluster. Beginning in bar 6 there are two layers of polyphony, one played by violin 1 and viola, another played by violin 2 and cello, representing the folk materials, with embedded motives of quintuplets (indicated with x in the example). One of the x figures serves as an ornament at the end of the phrase; the other sounds as an interruption of the phrase, as the notes in the quintuplet are not from pentatonic scale. Moreover, the figure x is further developed into textural materials in the background.

Example 4.14: Two layers of polyphony in *Fiddle Suite*

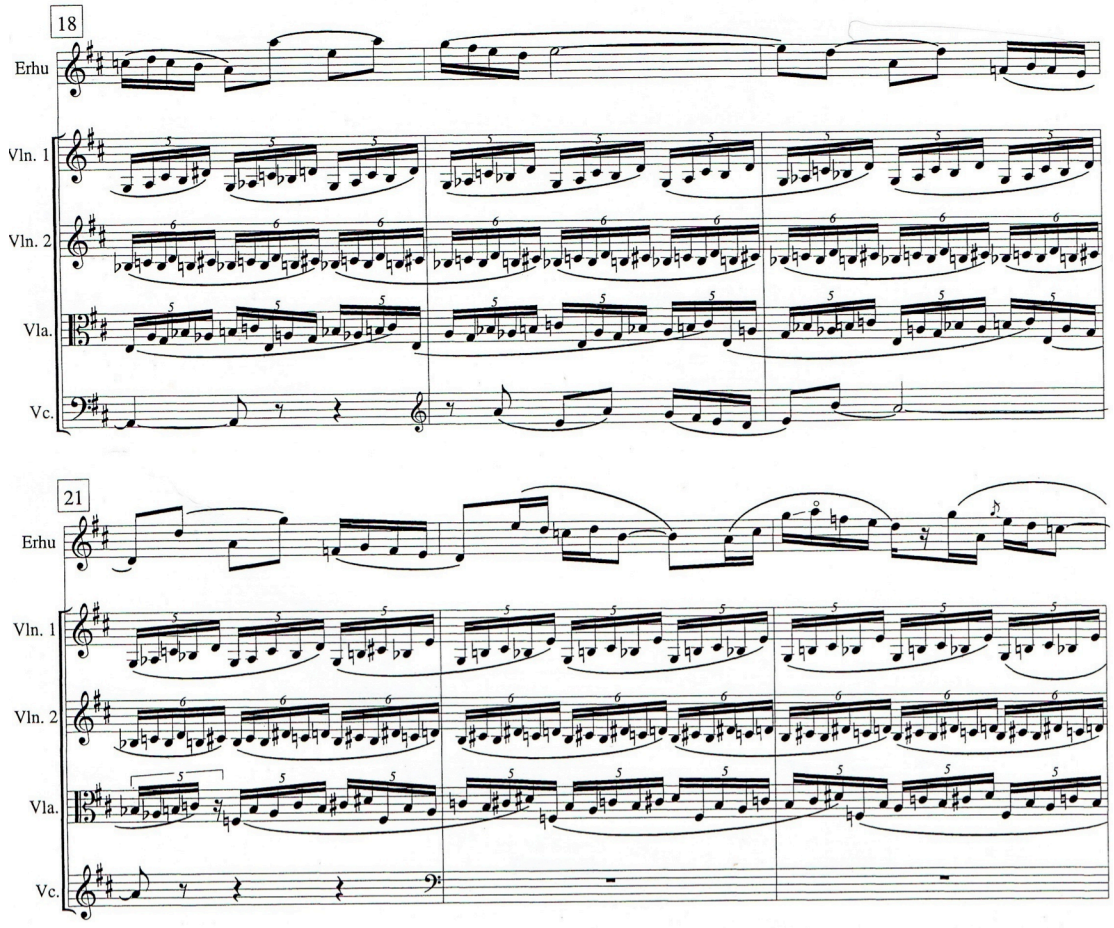


Beginning in measure 15 the background texture of micropolyphony[9] shown inside of the texture of two-layer polyphony of the erhu and cello produces an unstable atmosphere in contrast to the imitations of the outer lines (Ex. 4.15). The sonic collision of the two distinct textures continues and resolved in bar 29 when the background shifts to foreground with all the strings play the same folk –like melody together. The following

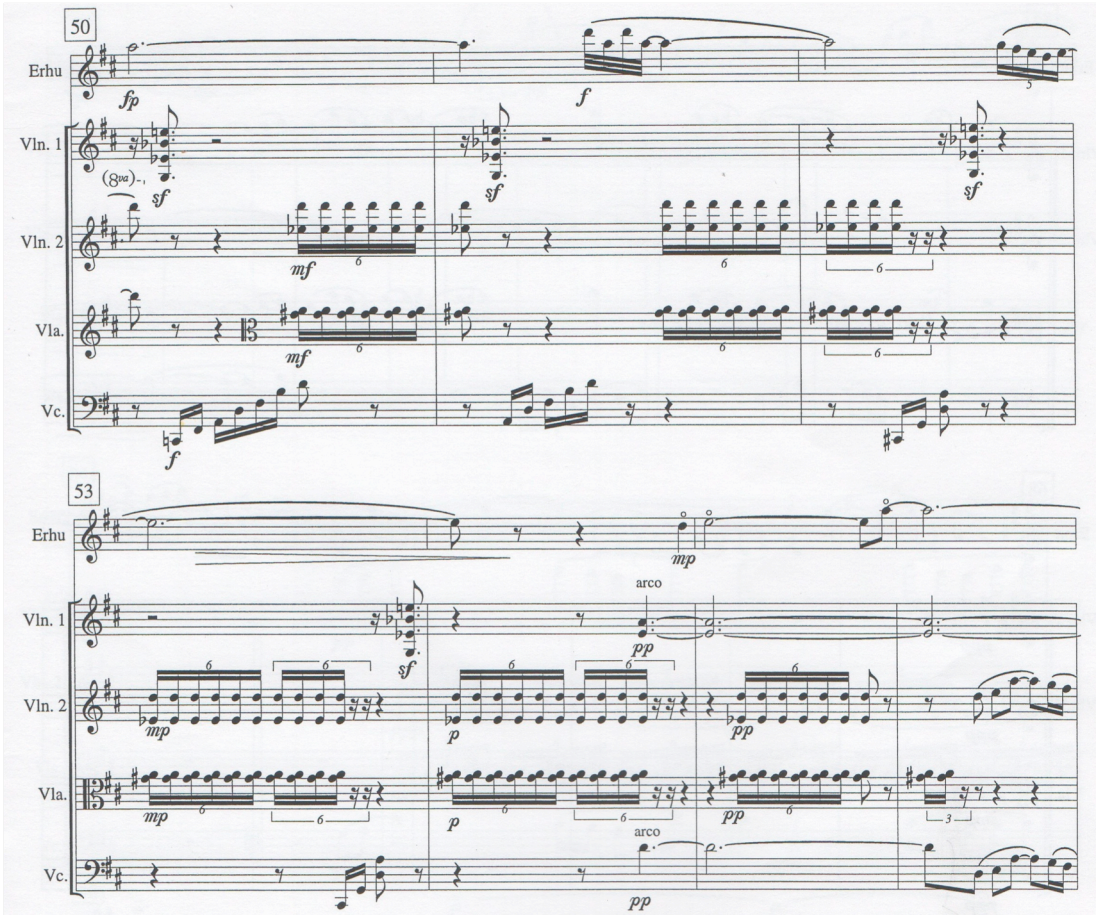
[9] "Micropolyphony is a type of 20th century musical texture involving a simultaneity of different lines, rhythms, and timbres. Developed by György Ligeti, micropolyphony resembles cluster chords, but differs in its use of moving rather than static lines." David Cope, *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer* (New York: Schirmer,1997), 101.

section beginning in 50 further presents a different texture composed of chords as a contrast to the previous section (Ex. 4.16). Beginning in measure 56 represents a similar texture of two-layer polyphony as the beginning section, followed by the cadenza section played by solo line of Erhu. Finally, the last section presents the opening main folk-like melody in outer voices, but with the texture of micro-polyphny inside.

Example 4.15: Texture in *Fiddle Suite*, bar 15



Example 4.16: Chordal texture in *Fiddle Suite*



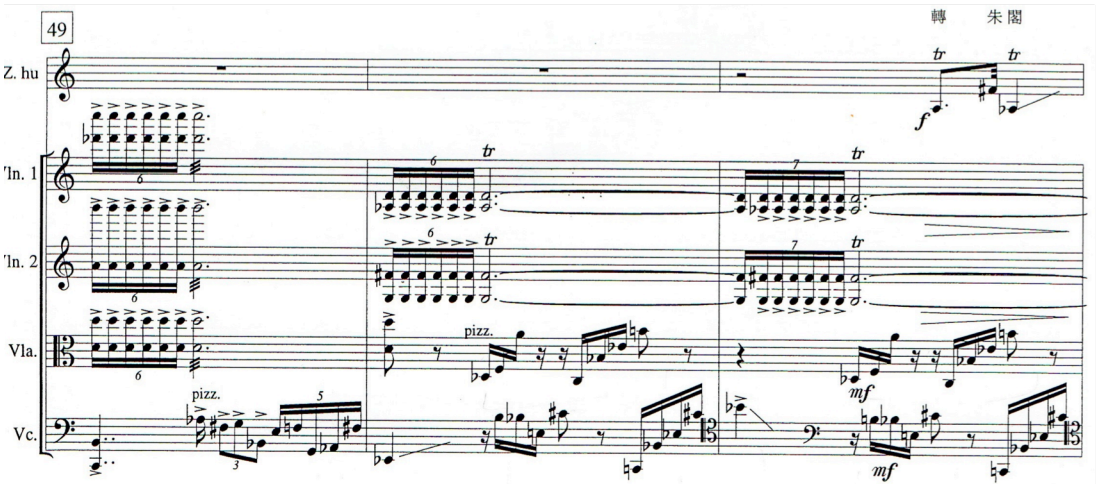
The overall form is well defined with its diverse styles of texture. Since the main thematic folk-melody appears throughout the piece and is varied in each A section, the form is not the same as a traditional rondo form in which the principle theme alternates with contrasting themes; the movement's form is defined by a contrasting of texture.

Table 4.1: Form and textures in *Fiddle Suite*, "Singing"

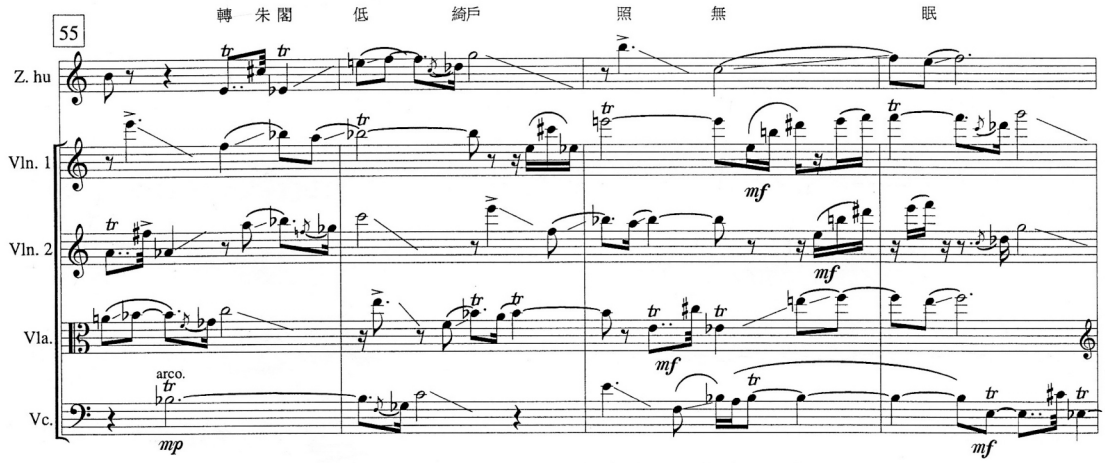
Parts	A	B	A'	C	A''	Cadenza	B' (Codetta)
Measure	1 - 14	15 – 28	29 - 42	43 - 55	56 - 65	66 - 84	85 - 91
Texture	Two-layer polyphony	Two-layer polyphony + micro-polyphony	Two-layer polyphony	One solo line+ tone cluster	Two-layer polyphony	Solo melody	Solo melody + two-layer polyphony of qizhou and micro-polyphony

The same kind of collage of textures can be seen in the second movement of *Fiddle Suite* as well. String instruments in this movement mostly serve as background materials, in the style of micropolyphony, to reinforce the zhonghu's line. Starting from bar 49, the accompanimental part has two layers, one made of the chordal material in violin 1 and 2, the other made with the up-and-down figures resembling ostinato figures in viola and cello. Thus the two layers combined with the solo line of the zhonghu form three distinct layers of texture (Ex. 4.17). Beginning in bar 53 to 67, the zhonghu and strings start to imitate one another in a canonic style, no longer having the melody-dominated texture as before, resulting in strata of polyphonic progression (Ex. 4.18).

Example 4.17: Three-layer texture in *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting"



Example 4.18: Polyphonic texture in *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting"



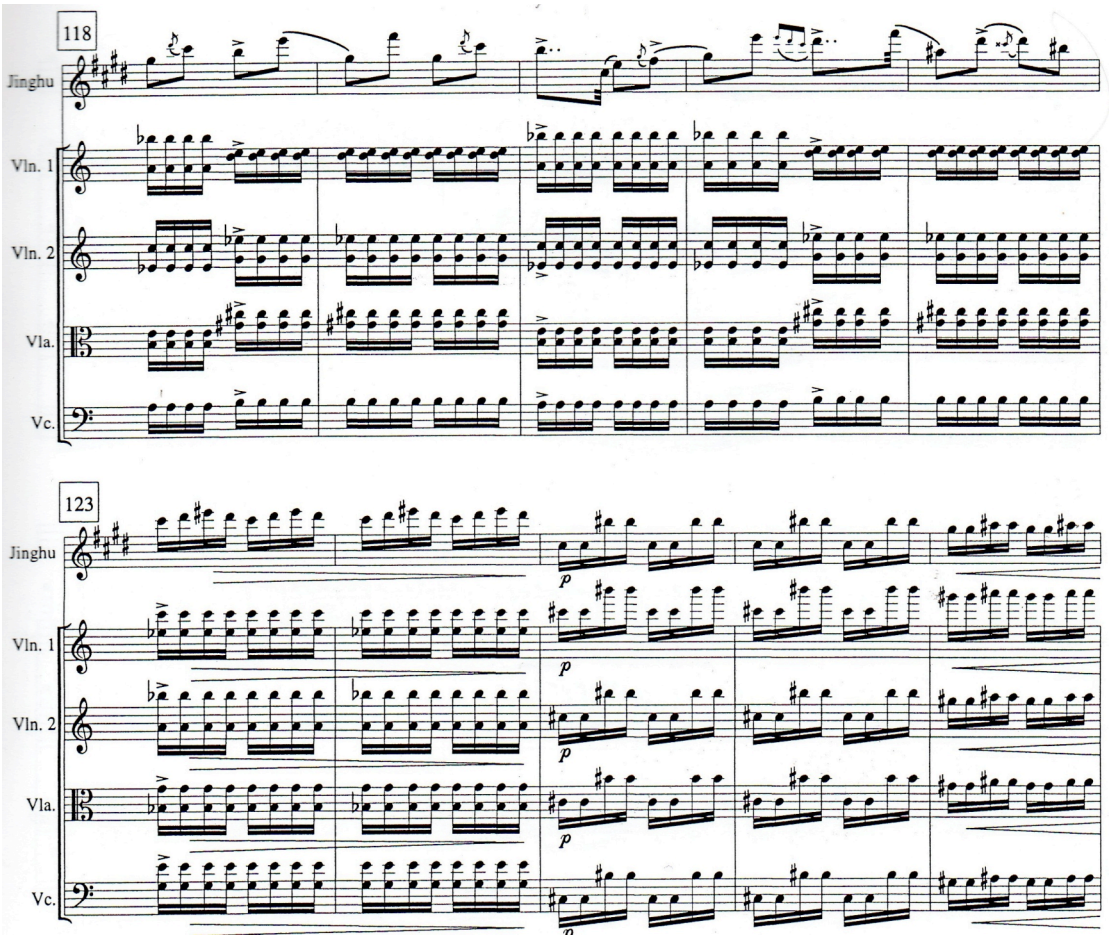
The collage style of texture in the second movement is very similar to the first movement. In addition, the order of the form is somewhat similar, for example, before the ending with solo line and codetta, there are sections of chordal material and polyphony.

Table 4.2: Texture in *Fiddle Suite*, "Reciting"

Sections	A	B	C	Bridge	Coda
Texture	Solo line+micro-polyphony	Solo line+micro-polyphony (in high register)	Three layers of solo+clusters (m.49 – 52), 5-voice polyphony (m.52 – 61), tutti (m.62 – 67)	Solo	Solo line + three-voice polyphony
Measure	1 - 26	27 - 48	49 - 68	69 - 78	79- 90

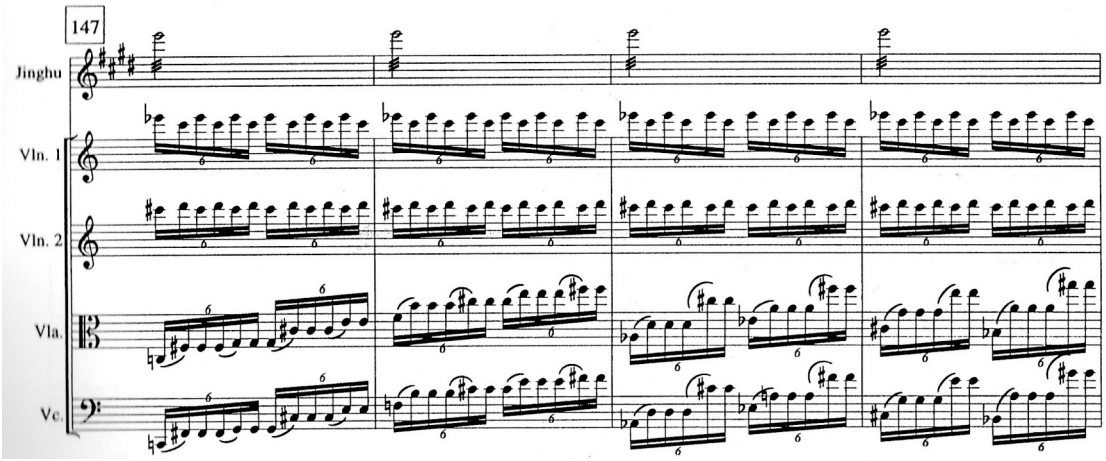
The chordal material that already appeared in the previous movements becomes the main part in the third movement, "Dancing." The chordal materials are always played together by the strings, with constant sixteenth notes, shaping a moving saw-like contour, creating a different kind of texture composed of tone clusters that are not the same as the ones we have seen in the previous movements. The chordal materials in the string part create a denser texture accompanying the jinhu's solo line. Sometimes the jinhu plays the line itself, sometimes it plays the same melodic line as the strings, creating an effect that alternates the texture between thin and dense, back and forth frequently in this movement.

Example 4.19: Chordal texture in *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing"

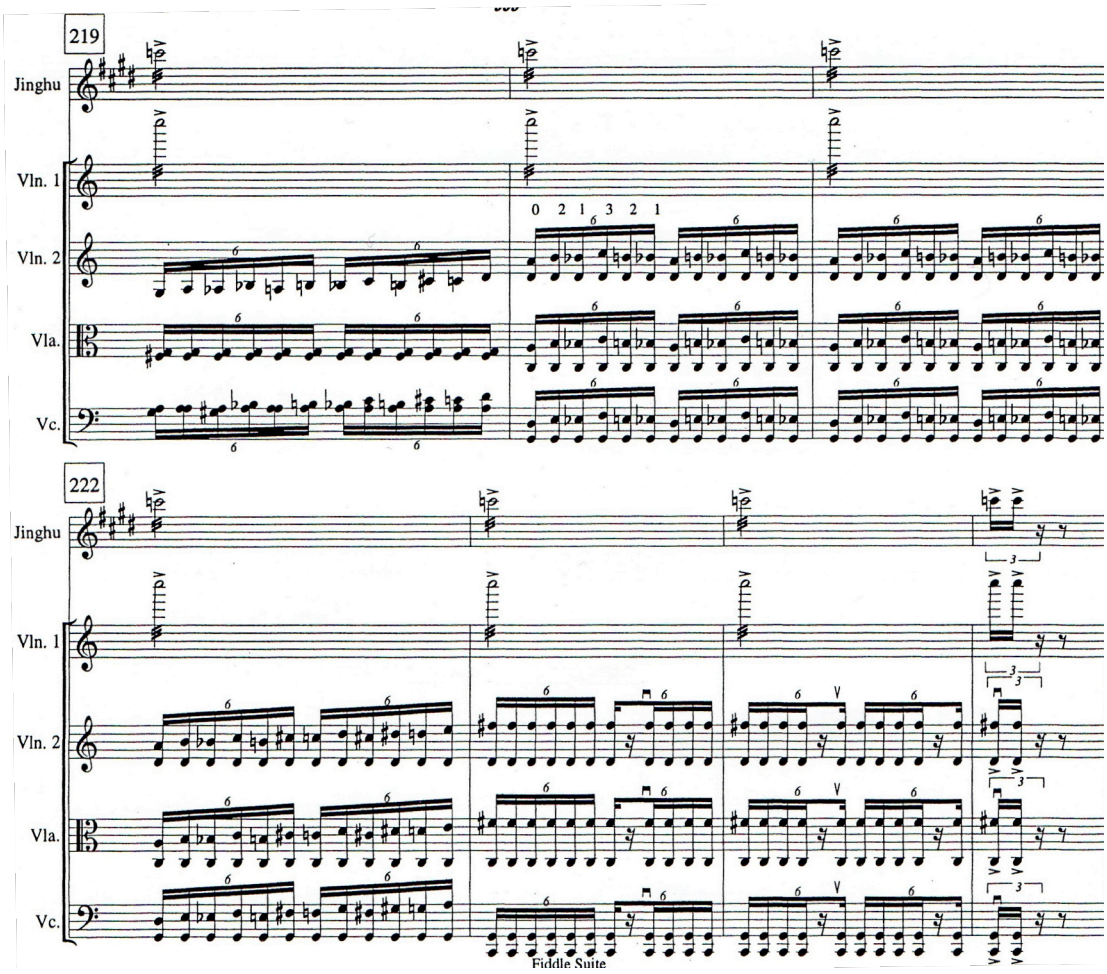


Diverse textures and layers of materials can be seen in this movement as well, besides the texture composed of up-and-down chordal materials shown in the example, the texture is further transformed into another one (Ex. 4.20), and finally developed into the micro-polyphonic texture in the end (Ex. 4.21).

Example 4.20: The transformed texture in *Fiddle Suite,* "Dancing"

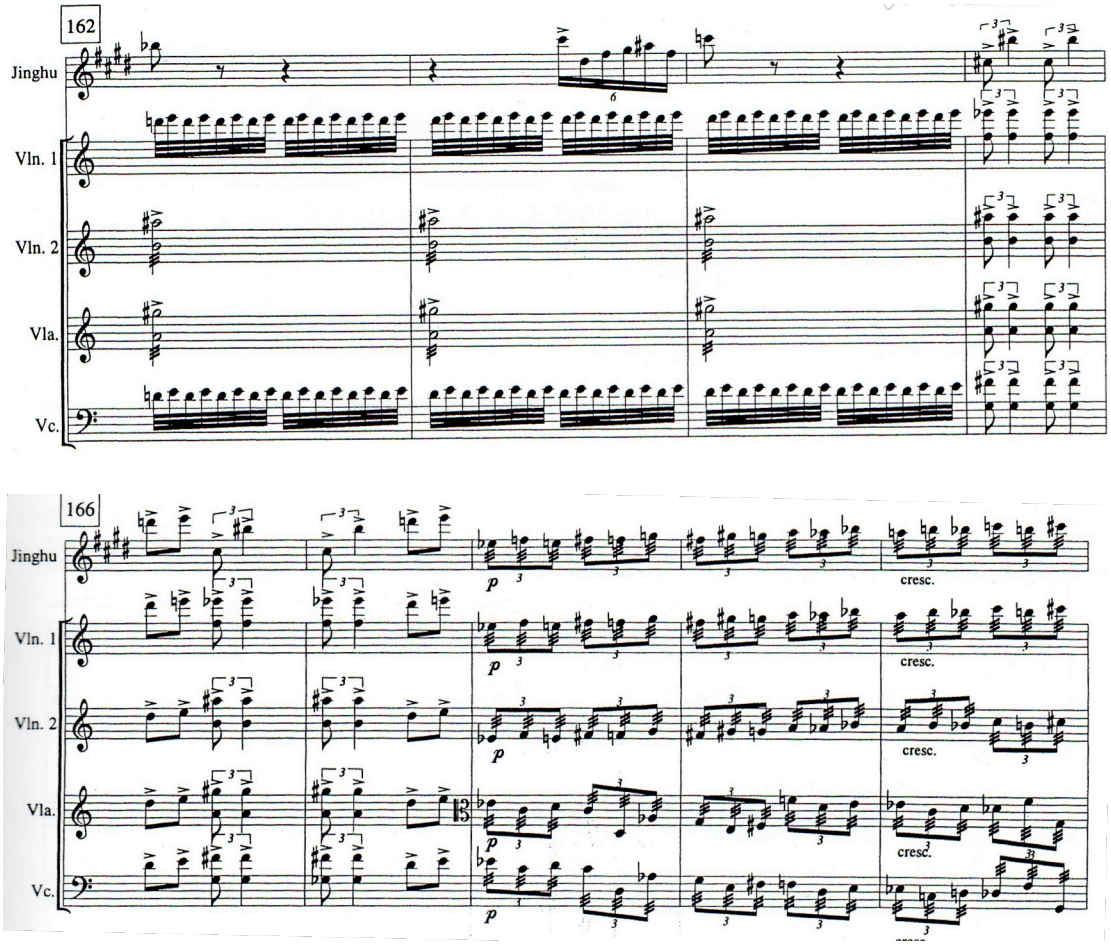


Example 4.21: Micro-polyphonic texture in *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing"



The diverse textures in this movement create contrasting episodes, sometimes one idea of texture transformed and developed into a different texture. Sometimes the flow is interrupted by the juxtaposition of a different texture unexpectedly, as in measure 165, shown in example 4.22.

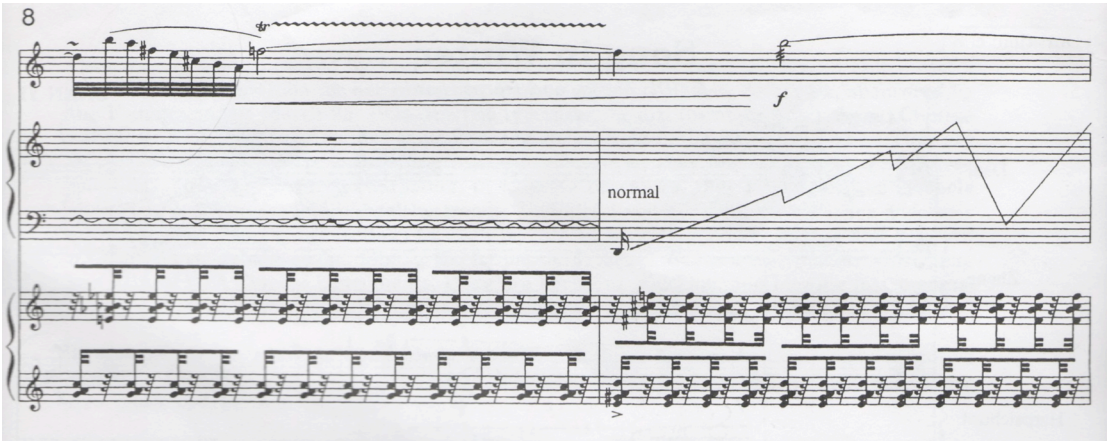
Example 4.22: Diverse textures in *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing



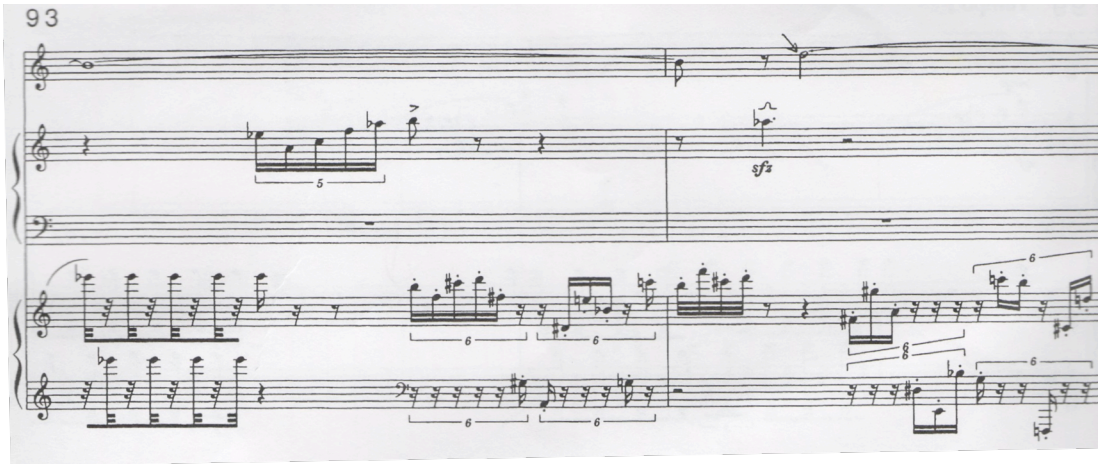
Song in Winter

In *Song in Winter,* we find styles of textures different from the examples we have seen in *Fiddle Suite*. One of the distinct texture is the linear materials made by dadi on top of the chordal materials with harpsichord in the beginning of the piece (Ex. 4.23). Another distinct texture in this piece is the pointillism (Ex. 4.24). The zheng occasionally manifests the same style of pointillism, as an echo to harpsichord, however, the zheng mostly is a part of the melodic lines weaving with the dadi.

Example 4.23: Linear and chordal texture in Song in Winter



Example 4.24: Pointillism in *Song in Winter*, bar 93 to 96



Texture in Chen's music not only creates contrast and drama, it also helps define the music forms. Chen often uses a different texture when the music proceeds to a different section. In addition, the diverse textures are developed in a logical way instead of randomly being put together, the same way she synthesizes and develop the pitch materials, influenced by both East and West. In the next chapter, we will see how Chen fuses the ideas of East and West and embraces Western techniques as means to organize her music materials.

CHAPTER 5

INCORPORATION OF WESTERN MUSICAL TECHNIQUES: ORGANIZATION OF PITCH, RHYTHM AND FORM

The preservation of ancient Chinese music is problematic because it lacks a precise notation. Its ambiguity contributes to Chinese music's unique style – players have their own interpretations and diverse styles of performing the same piece of music over a long period of time. Players learn the music from masters who mainly play from memory that they in turn learned from their predecessors. Starting from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, China has been reevaluating and adapting many focal points of Western political, social, economic, educational, and technological systems and lifestyles. Great numbers of Chinese composers have been influenced by Western music by adapting Western notation and studying Western harmony from the common practice period. Chinese composers in the current period believe the more precise notation, forms and systemized materials in music will lead Chinese music into a more scientific way of organization.[1] Modern styles incorporating Western influence in Chinese music in this period include harmonizing Chinese traditional folk songs with Western music language from the common practice period or playing the folk songs on the Western instruments homophonically accompanied by music in the style of the 19th Romantic period.

Inspired by Chou Wen-chung, a group called "The New Wave" emerged with an avant-garde spirit in the mid-1980s. Separating themselves from earlier composers, the New Wave composers seek the true, meaningful elements in Chinese music, whether those elements are the aesthetics of Eastern music, time, sounds or

[1] Chang, *Chou Wen-Chung, The Life and Work of a Contemporary Chinese-born American Composer*, 180.

philosophy. They use Chinese materials in a subtle way instead of directly quoting the folk materials, aligning with Chou against what he called "superficial orientalization."[2]

We can see that Chen Yi has taken the path that the New Wave composers initiated. As in the music of the New Wave composers, it is rare to find a direct quotation of Chinese folk material in complete form in Chen Yi's music. If the quotations are made, the materials are always masked in different ways. For example, we can see that the Chinese folk song, "Jasmine Flower" at the end of Chen's *Ning* is distorted with fragmentation and transposition, arranged in different registers and played with artificial harmonics in the strings so that the quotation of the song becomes a metaphor for the dreadful war presented in Chen's piece.

Pitch Organization

Song in Winter

The forging of abstraction from folk elements and her exploration of post-tonal approaches began under the guidance of Chou and Mario Davidovsky at Columbia University. Pieces such as *Woodwind Quintet* (1987) and *Near Distance* (1988) already show her early exploration of pitch organization at the time when she was studying twelve-tone and free atonal techniques.[3] *Song of Winter* (1993), composed a few years later, also shows Chen's interest in integrating the techniques of twelve-tone series and free atonality uniquely based on the Chinese pentatonic scale with the combined Western (harpsichord) and Chinese (dadi and zheng)

[2] Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, chapter two: "Fusion or Fission: The Paradox and Politics of Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Music" (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 27.

[3] Author's email correspondence with Chen Yi.

instrumentation. At the beginning of the piece, the harpsichord delineates a twelve-tone series (Ex. 5.2). The twelve-tone row is manifested linearly and also appears simultaneously as chords in this piece. The row contains the cell of (0, 2, 5), the most characteristic feature in the pentatonic scale (Figure 5.1).

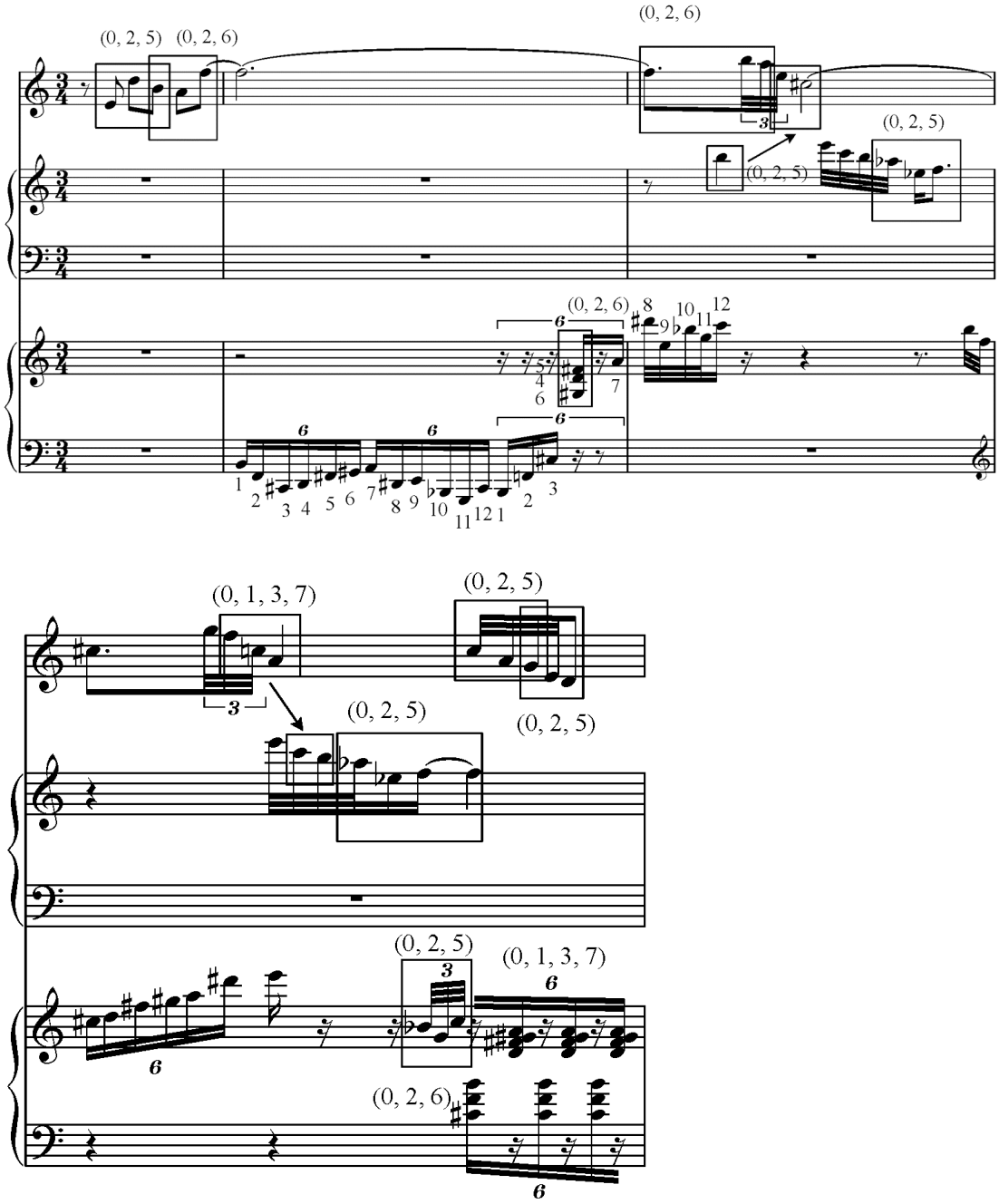
Figure 5.1: The twelve-tone row in the harpsichord part with cell (0, 2, 5)

(0, 2, 5)

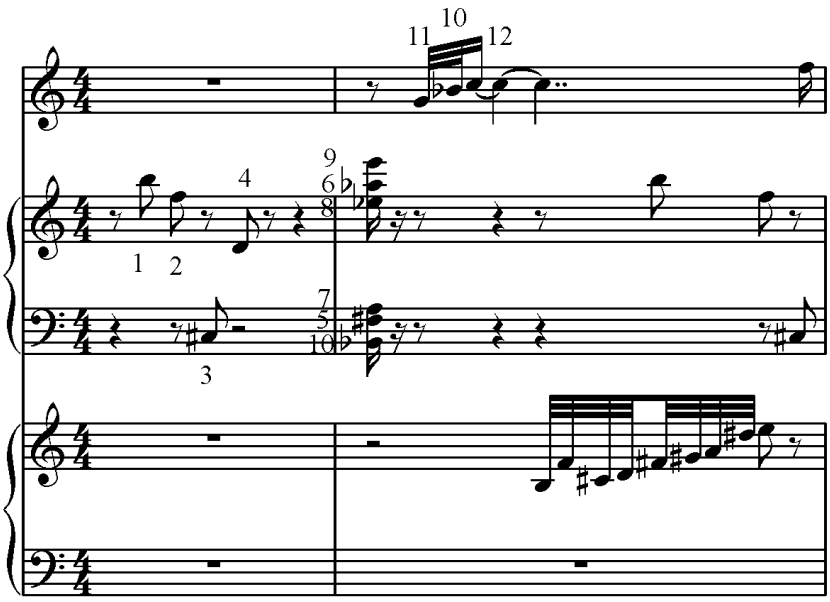
B F C# D F# G# A D# E **Bb G C**

The pitch class set (0, 2, 5) links the materials of the strict twelve tone row played by the harpsichord and free atonality played by the dadi and zheng, because as we can see in the beginning of the piece (Ex. 5.1), the pitch class set (0, 2, 5) resides in both the harpsichord, and the dadi and zheng's lines. In the next section, beginning in measure 31, the zheng starts to share the same twelve-tone row as the harpsichord, and the dadi's line occasionally includes part of the row in its pentatonic melody (Ex. 5.2).

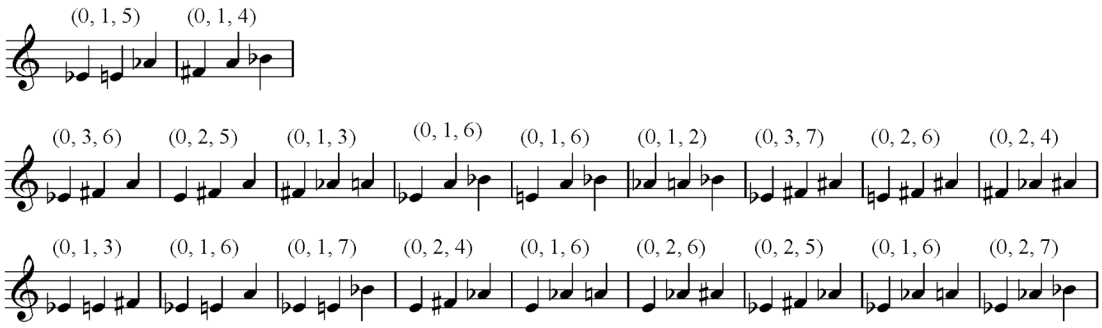
Example 5.1: Twelve-tone row and pitch class sets in *Song in Winter*, bar 1 to 4



Example 5.2: *Song in Winter*, bar 31

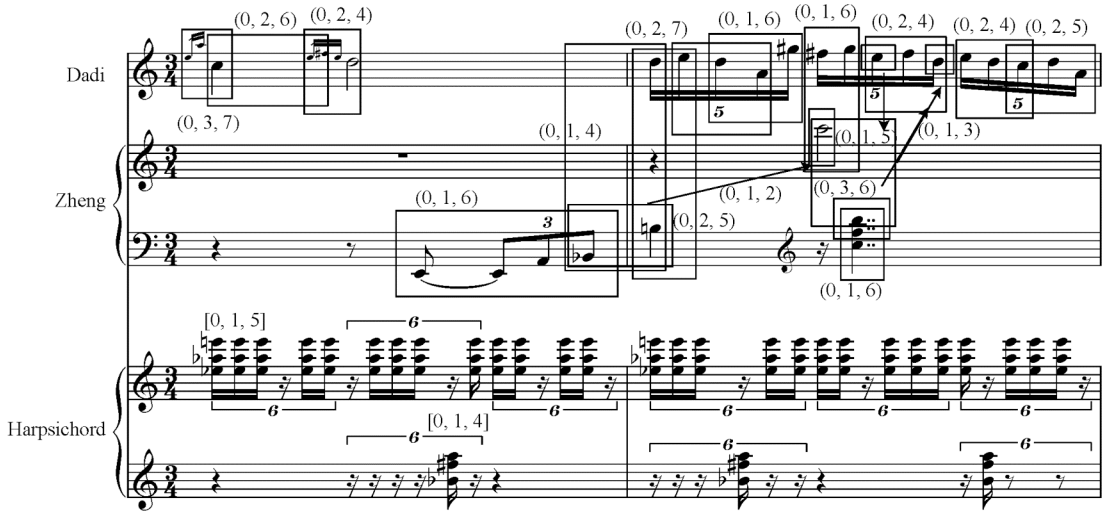


In this piece, we can see the ways in which Chen fuses the two musical ideas of twelve-tone series and free atonality based on pentatonic scale. The pentatonic scale sometimes appears in complete form, sometimes fragmented and transposed, emphasizing the same pitch class sets as the twelve-tone row. Example 5.3 shows the harpsichord emphasizing the trichords that are part of the twelve-tone series and the same emphasis of the pitch class sets is found in the dadi and zheng. The two trichords in the harpsichord present the two pitch-class sets: (0, 1, 4) and (0, 1, 5). The two chords repeat, alternating rapidly almost at the same time, for six measures. The possibilities created by the two interval-class sets are as follows:



All the combinations of sonorities can be found in the dadi and zheng's parts as well, as shown in example 5.3.

Example 5.3: *Song in Winter*, bar 62 to 63



In addition, because the zheng is required to play the materials of the twelve-tone row beginning in measure 31, Chen Yi retunes the zheng's strings. The zheng is originally tuned to a pentatonic scale. Chen makes use of the zheng's movable bridges, which allow easy tuning to different scales, and retunes the open strings of the zheng so that the open strings share the same property as the twelve-tone row and thus the execution of playing the materials of free atonality with the Chinese instrument becomes effortless.

Figure 5.2: The zheng's original tuning

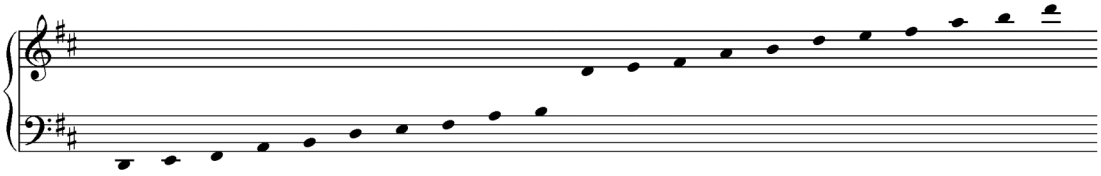
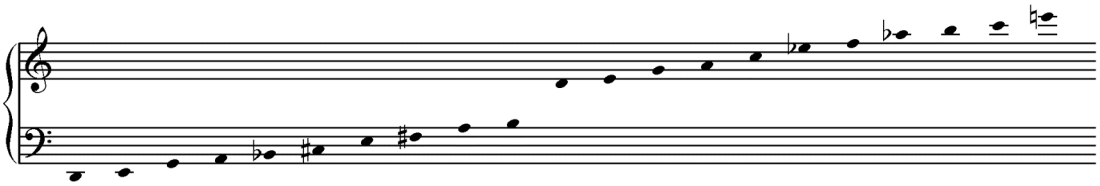


Figure 5.3: Chen Yi's retuning of the instrument in *Song in Winter*



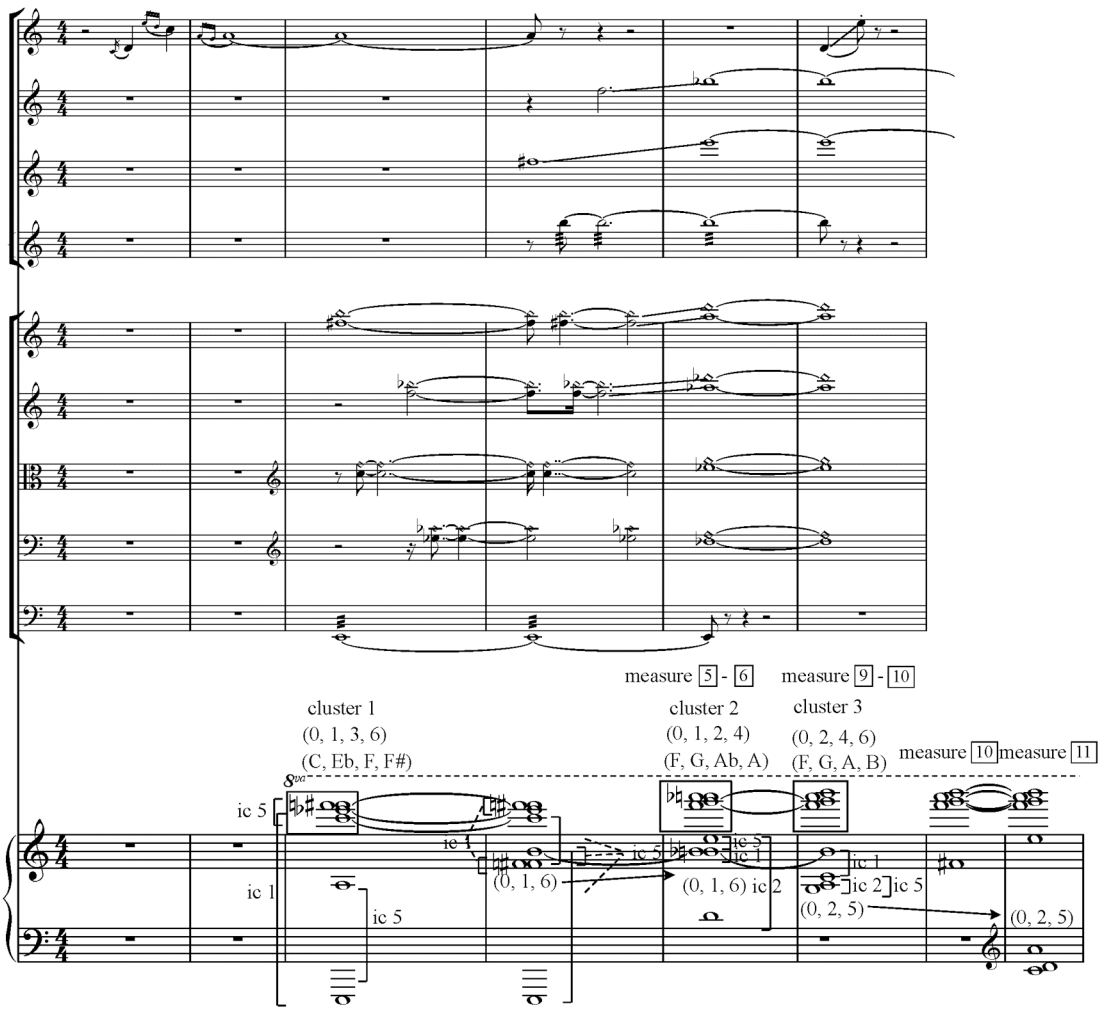
The retuning of strings for Chinese instruments can be found in other pieces such as *Chinese Fable*s, *The Points* and *The Ancient Beauty*. Although these pieces are not twelve-tone pieces, the retuning of the strings creates more sonorities besides the materials from the pentatonic scale.

The Ancient Beauty

The Ancient Beauty is another example that shows the way Chen uses free atonality, blending pentatonic materials with a post-tonal compositional style. The example below is a reduction of the score showing Chen's basic idea of connecting and developing different materials by maintaining common notes and sharing the same interval classes. As we can see in the Example 5.4, from m. 3 to m. 10, there are three layers of materials in different registers. The clusters in the highest register of the strings serve as background materials; materials in the middle register are pentatonic materials, mostly appearing linearly; the lowest sustained sound played by the double bass produces the third layer. The example shows that different layers of materials sharing the same interval classes connect the ideas both horizontally and

vertically. The background clusters in the high register labeled as clusters 1, 2 and 3 from measures 1 to 11 not only share the same interval classes (they all share IC 2; cluster 1 and 2 share IC 1, 2 and 3; cluster 2 and 3 share IC 2 and 4; cluster 1 and 3 share IC 2 and 6), they also share common tones connecting the horizontal progression. The vertical relationship of layers is shown in the example as well. Measures 3 and 4 are indicated with brackets showing the same interval classes the three layers share; the connection of the vertical harmonies among the layers can be discovered throughout the piece.

Example 5.4: *The Ancient Beauty*, "The Bronze Taotie," bar 1 to 6

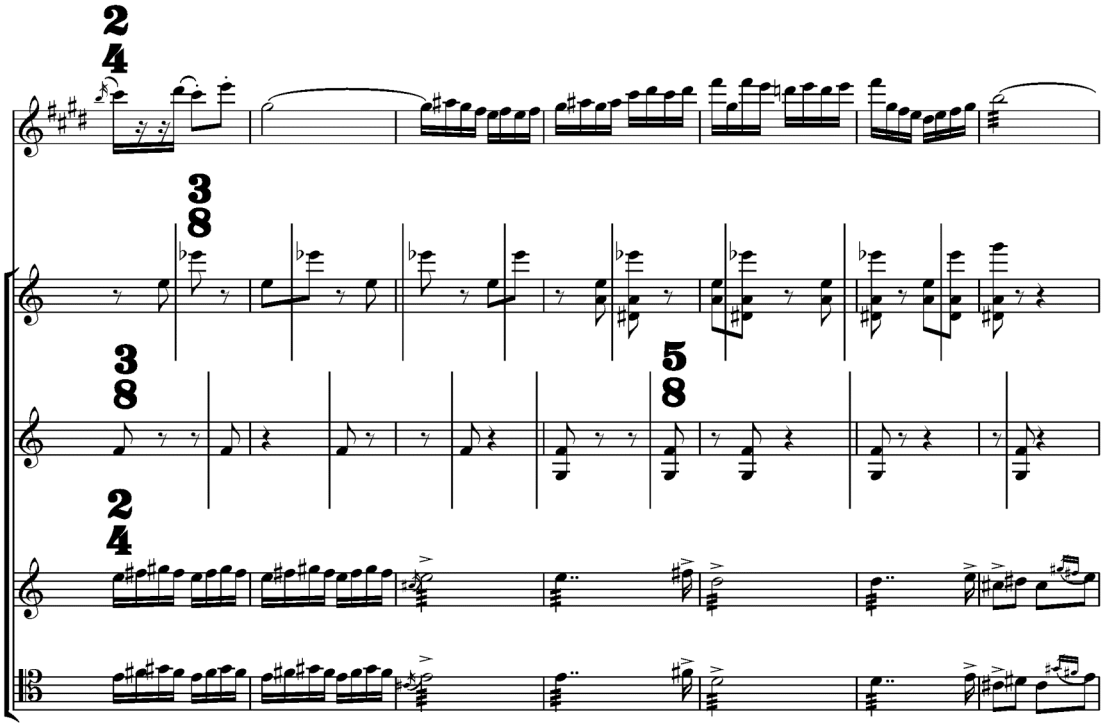


Rhythmic techniques absorbed from the West

Polymeter

An example of polymeter is found in *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing," from bar 71, where different meters appear simultaneously. Although the music is notated in 2/4, each line has a different rhythmic pattern. As we can see in the example 5.5, violin I places a strong accent on the Eb in a relatively high register while violin II stresses the downbeat in the lower register. This rhythmic characteristic, where each voice has a different stress on the downbeat also appears at bar 190 and 40 in the movement.

Example 5.5: *Fiddle Suite*, "Dancing," bar 71 to 76



Rhythmic Series and Form

Chinese Fables

In the interview with John de Clef Piñeiro, Chen Yi mentioned some of the Western composers she admires most, including Bartok, Debussy, Stravinsky and Lutoslawski.

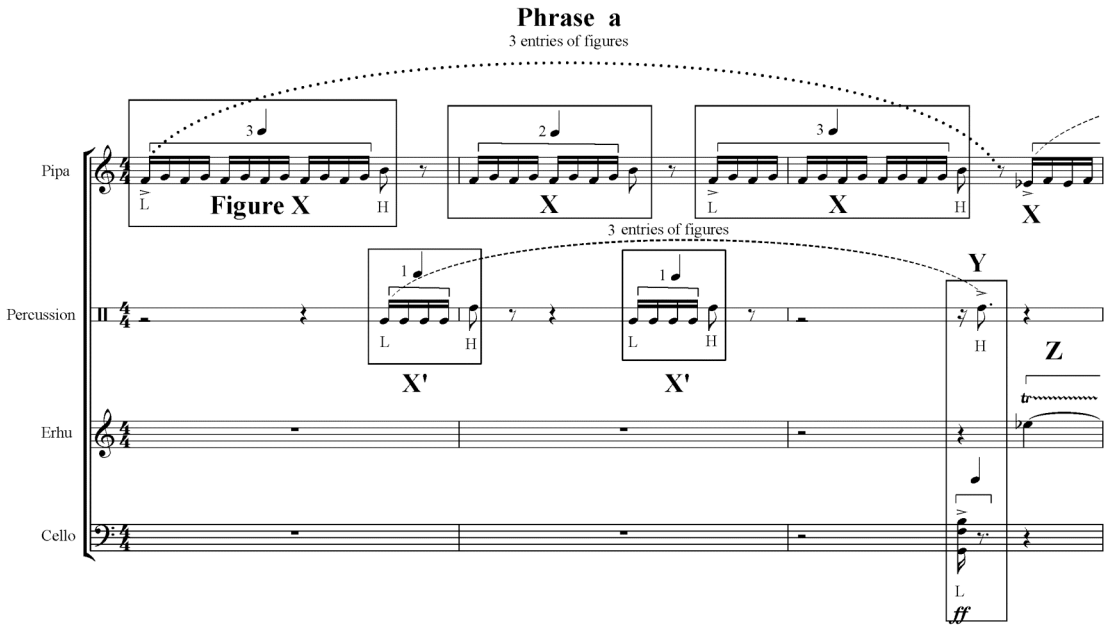
> I love the music of Bartok, Debussy and Stravinsky, as well as Lutoslawski's cello concerto, Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*, and Berg's piano sonata and violin concerto. Also one can discover so much in Shostakovich, and in Messiaen's *personnages rythmiques* [a technique of organizing rhythmic progressions] – I find the latter closely related to my folk culture (traditional opera singing and reciting, folk percussion ensemble music, and so on), and they deeply match my taste. After I came to the States, I found so many fine composers from the generation prior to mine, from my own, and from the younger groups, with fresh concepts and great creativity.[4]

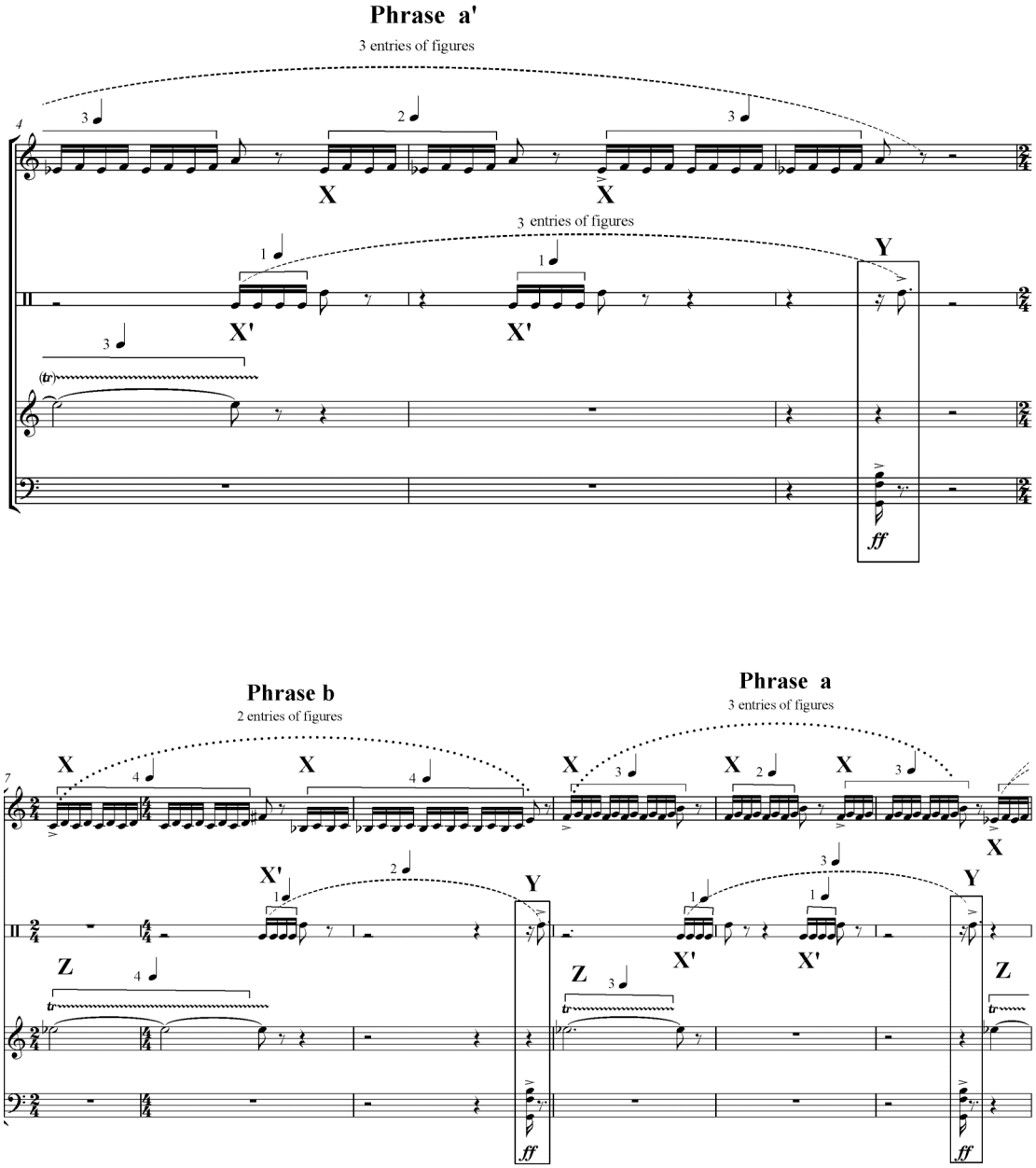
We can see Chen's interest in utilizing materials from folk songs as do Bartok, et al., and they share similar musical aesthetics. Chen's affinity for the musical style of Messiaen, especially his organization of rhythm -- *personnages rythmiques* -- although different from her own, is important. A more systematic approach to rhythm can be found in the 2nd movement of Chen's *Chinese Fables,* "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf." The musical example shows layers of rhythmic pattern in the first section. The pipa follows a numerical sequence of 3 2 3 with sixteenth notes in the value of quarter notes, followed by a relatively higher pitch eighth note in the duration of one quarter note. Punctuation played by the cello and percussion always happens at the end of the series of 3 2 3, representing the basic sonic idea of low-and-high sounds (indicated with capital L and H in the score) in the phrase. Although each line of pipa, percussion, erhu and cello has its independent cycle of series, we can hear the interplay among the voices as the instruments echo one another in rhythm and timber.

[4] Piñeiro, "Interview."

In the analysis, figurative patterns are indicated with X Y Z in the score and diagram. X represents the pipa's constant sixteenth notes, echoed by the wood block, indicated with X'. Y represents the figure of sixteenth note and dotted eighth, punctuated by cello and wood block. Z represents the long-sustained trill figure which always underlines the beginning of a new phrase. Letter a represents the phrases that contain the pattern of X X' X X' X Y while b presents the phrases that contan X X' X Y.

Example 5.6: Rhythmic series and phrase structure in *Chinese Fables,* "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf"

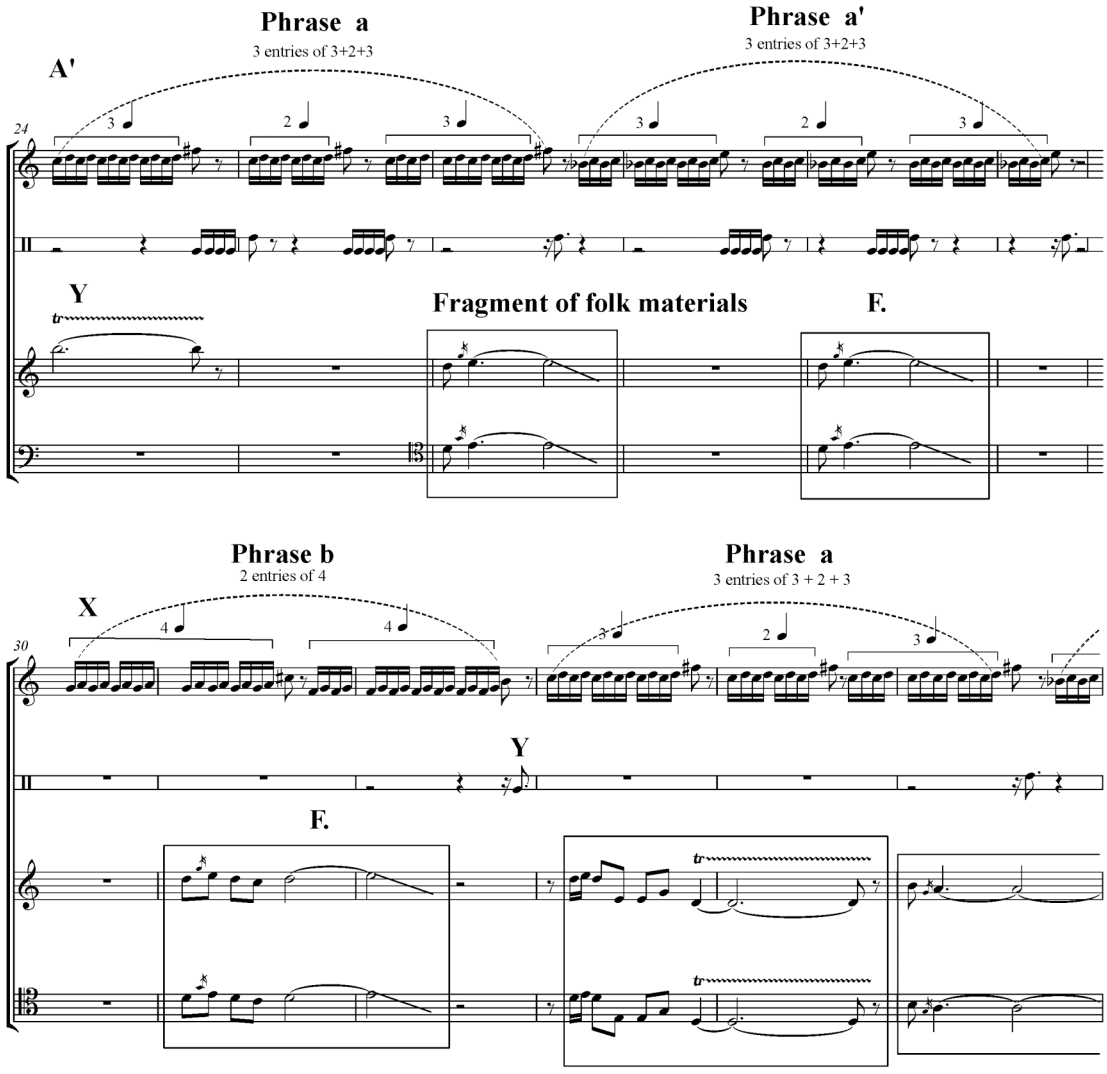




Beginning in measure 26 (Ex. 5.7) the erhu and cello gradually reveal folk-like melodies with the characteristic pitch bendings at the end of the phrases. The appearance of the folk materials in the later section are free from the serialized procedure of this movement, which, however, still lends consistency since the folk materials emphasizing the intervals of the second and third are found in the rhythmic figures in the first section and throughout the piece. Moreover, the gradual revealing

of the folk materials gives ongoing motion, in contrast to the first section where the recurrence of the cycles of values in each layer creates a static feeling. Here, the focus has shifted to a more linear melodic development.

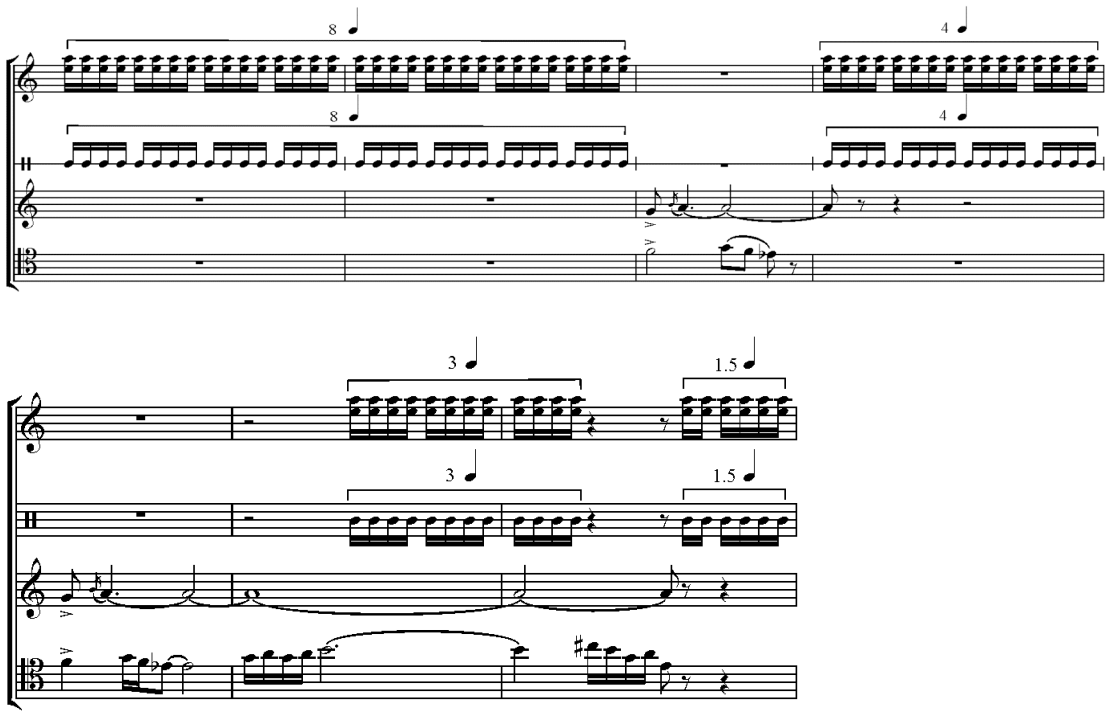
Example 5.7: The appearances of folk materials along with rhythmic series in "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf"



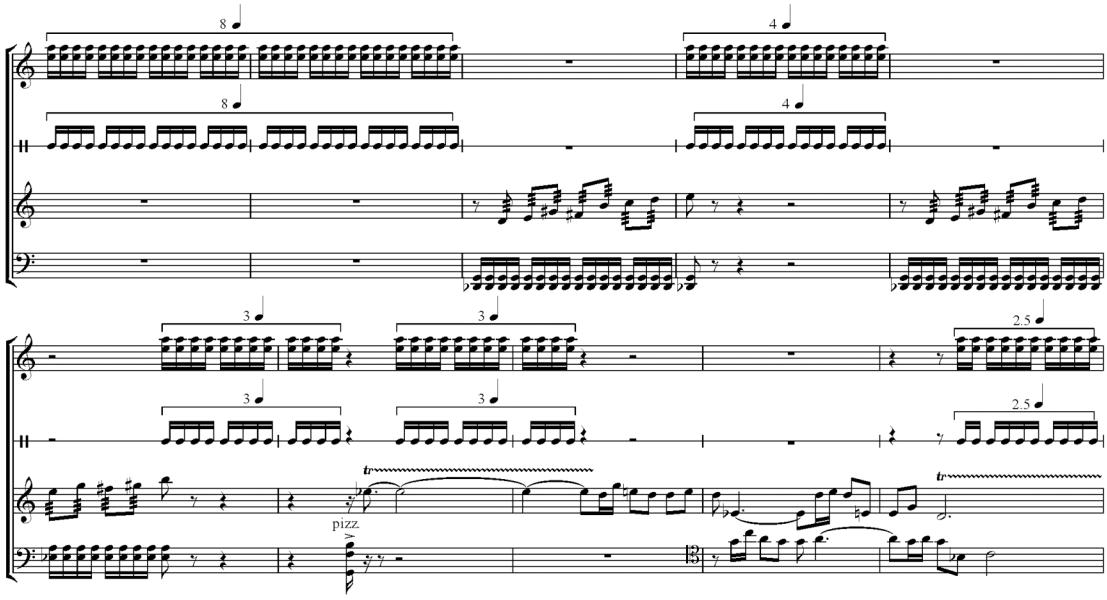
Section B, beginning in measure 47, uses the same materials of constant sixteenth notes and fragments of folk melodies as in section A. However, the sixteenth notes are always played *tutti* with the pipa and bass drum, manifesting

values of 8, 4 (half of 8), 3, 1.5 (half of 3). The same series appears the second time section B appears at the end, with expanded values of 8, 4, 3, 3 (added value), 2.5 (added value), shown in ex. 5.8 and 5.9.

Example 5.8: Rhythmic series in "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf", bar 47 to 83



Example 5.9: "Master Dong-guo and the Wolf", bar 116 to 125



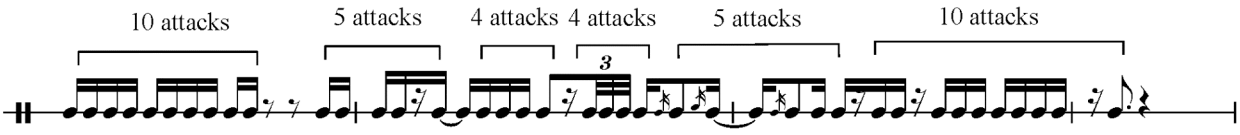
The overall form of this piece can be divided into two main parts: part I (measure 1 – 69) A A' B, and part II (70 – 145): A A' B Coda.

The integration of serial techniques in Chen's music does not strictly control all the musical elements and the procedure does not necessarily consistently apply throughout the piece. As in *Song in Winter,* with the coexistence of serialized rhythmic figures and folk melodies and the combination of twelve tone series and free atonality, we can see in *Chinese Fables* that the large portion of the compositional process still relies on the composer's musical instinct and the composer's personality is not removed through use of the systematized procedure.

Ancient Dances

The technique of numerical series is also applied to rhythm in the piece *Ancient Dances*. The rhythmic pattern of the percussion part in the introduction is shown in figure 5.4. The rhythmic attacks of sizzle cymbal are grouped and indicated with brackets, presenting a pattern of palindrome.

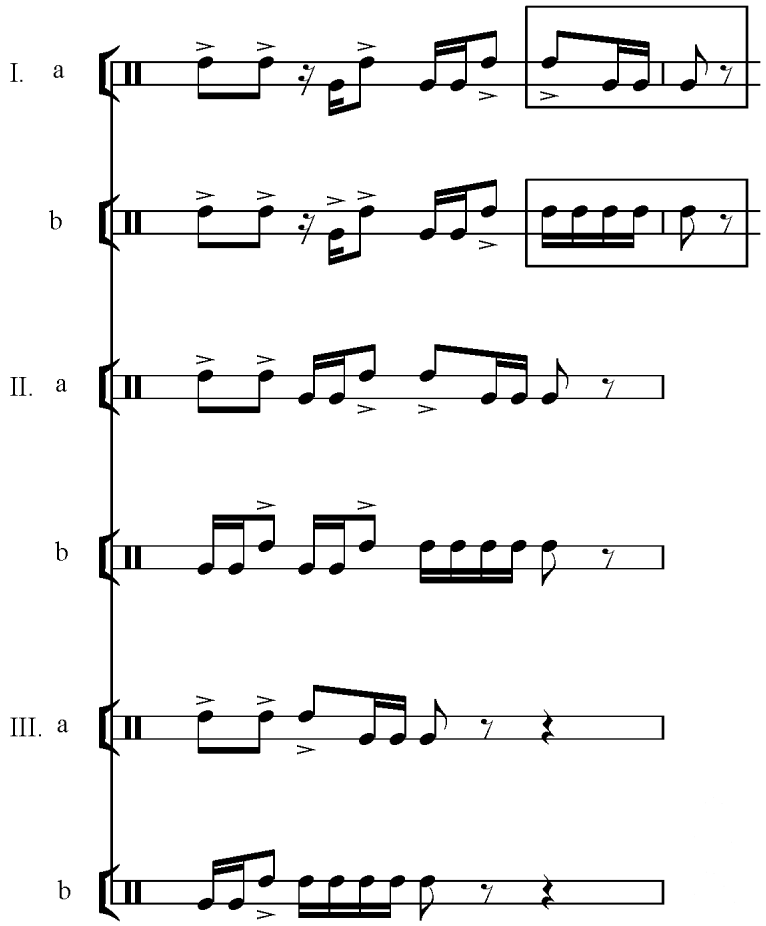
Figure 5.4: The Palindrome from percussion part in *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering"



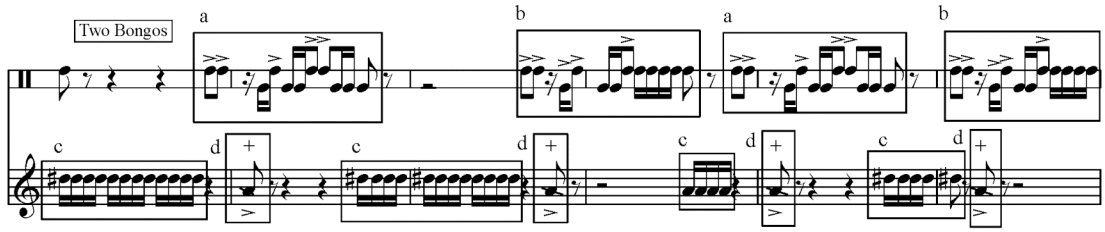
Beginning in measure 21 similar ideas of dual materials can be found in the pipa and percussion parts. The two bongos continuously play the rhythmic figures a and b with variation (Figure 5.5), while the pipa is in a loop of alternating two different figures, one being repeated notes, the other being percussive sounds employing an extended technique called *sha xian*[5], indicated with a "+" in the score (Ex. 5.10). Figure 5.3 shows the two rhythmic figures presented in the percussion part with two bongos, slightly different placement of accents between the two figures, the boxes compare the different rhythmic figures at the end. After the percussion instruments repeat twice the complete form of rhythmic figures, a and b from bar 21 to 26, durational diminution is applied from bar 27 to 30, as the diagram shows in figure 5. 5, numerals II and III. In the example, Roman numeral I shows the original form, II and III are the shorten and altered figures.

[5] *Sha xian* requires the fingernail of the left hand of the pipa player, to lightly touch beneath the string, resulting in a percussive sound when struck.

Figure 5.5: Rhythmic figures from the percussion part in *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering"



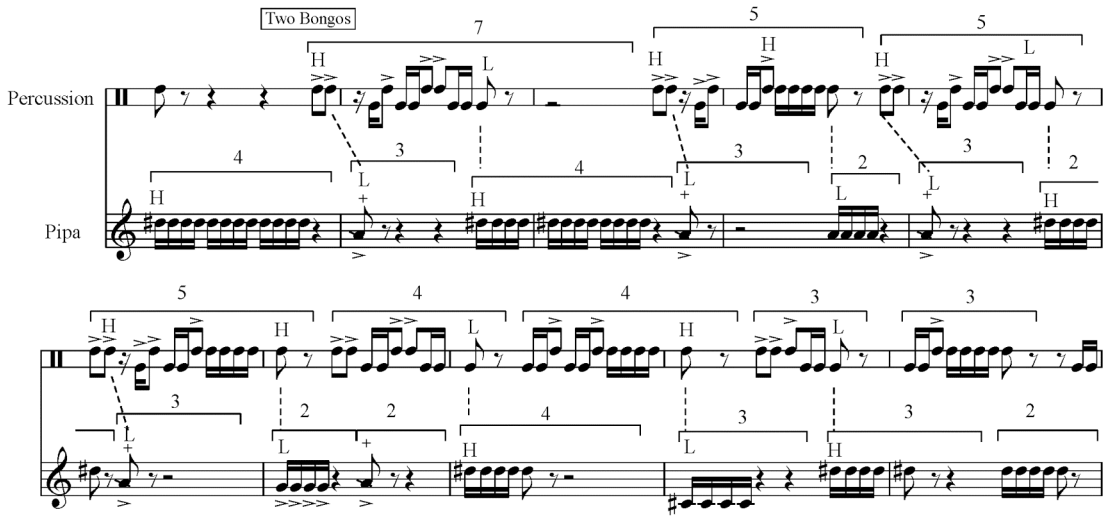
Example 5.10: Dual materials in the percussion and pipa, bars 21 to 26



The movement is constructed with rhythmic series. Every time section A appears, the same duration series is applied, although the pitches or percussion instruments are not always the same each time. Example 5.11 shows the duration series in section A.

Starting from the first attack until the next attack point, the duration value shown in brackets is based on the unit of a quarter note. The pipa employs a durational series of 2, 3, 4 while percussion is undergoing a series of 3, 4, 5, 7 with no particular order. The same series can be discovered in the reappearances of section A from bars 38 to 47; bars 55 to 64; bars 72 to 81; bars 145 to 155.

Example 5.11: Durational series in *Ancient Dances*, "Cheering", bars 21 to 30



The interplay in rhythm and timbre in section A between the two instruments can also be seen in example 5.11. The sixteenth-note rests in the percussion's rhythmic figures are always filled by the pipa's percussive sound. Moreover, when the percussion plays relatively high sounds before the rest, the pipa always plays a relatively low sound in response, and vice versa. In addition, example 5.11 shows the relatively high sounds (labeled with letter H) and the low sounds (labeled with letter L). The dotted line shows the two instruments alternatively or simultaneously playing high and low sounds.

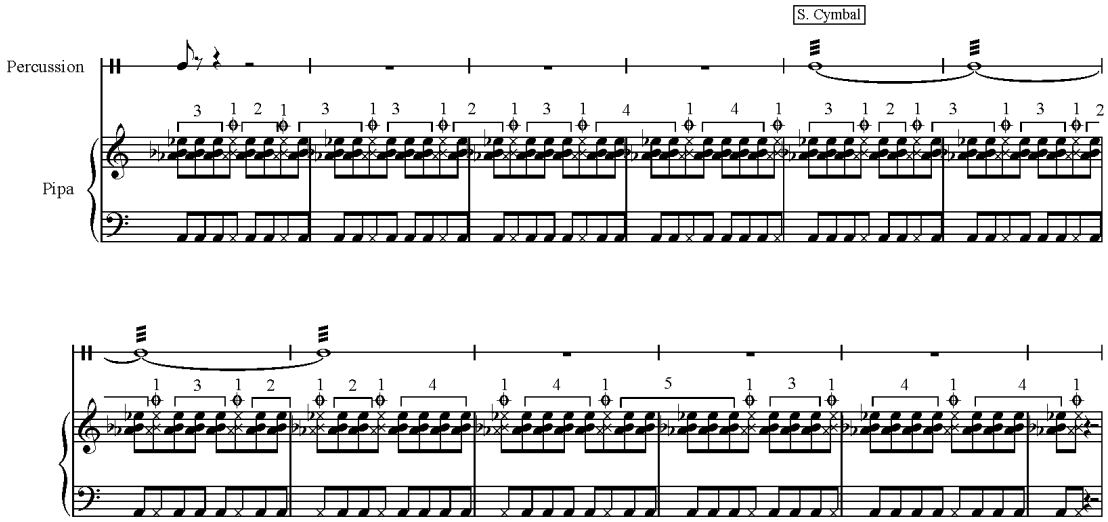
Section C is the most dramatic part, with the pipa constantly strumming four strings in eighth notes. The sounds produced with left hand dampening the strings divide the musical passage into groups of rhythmic values, based on numbers of

attacks, representing the units of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Percussion at bar 94 signifies the recurrence of the series. The numerical series is shown as following and in Ex. 5.12:

(3121)(3131)(2131)(4141)

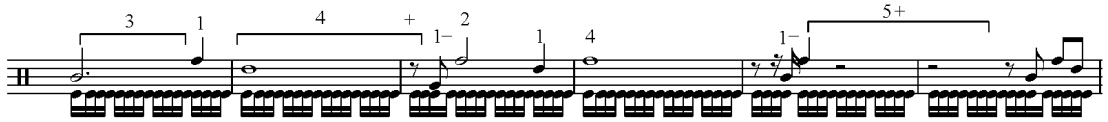
(3121)(3131)(2121)(2131)(4141)(5131)(4141)

Example 5.12: Durational series from the pipa part in section C in *Ancient Dnaces*, "Cheering"



The units of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are further applied in the percussion part with the durational series beginning in measure 103, though not in a particular order. (+) and (-) means the augmented value and diminuted value.

Figure 5.6: Durational series from the percussion part, bar 103 to 105 in *Ancient Dnaces*, "Cheering"



Form and golden section in "Cheering"

We have seen that the percussion part in section A is composed of alternating the two rhythmic ideas a and b. The pipa also develops the repetition of two ideas, as example 5.10 shows. As the individual pipa and percussion parts present repetition of dual figures echoing each other in section A, the general form in this movement also shows repetitions of the dual sections A and B. One focuses more on rhythmic figures, the other more on melodic materials, with the pipa's upward lines. In addition, outside of the introduction and coda in this movement, section B is the most dynamic and dense (the pipa plays constant chords instead of single lines and there are more percussion instruments in this part), showing the approximate golden section in this piece. The golden section, calculated with measure numbers, shows the small climax starting to build up from the end of sub-section a''' which leads to section B; calculated with duration, it falls around the sub-section d, which is the most dynamic section in the piece.

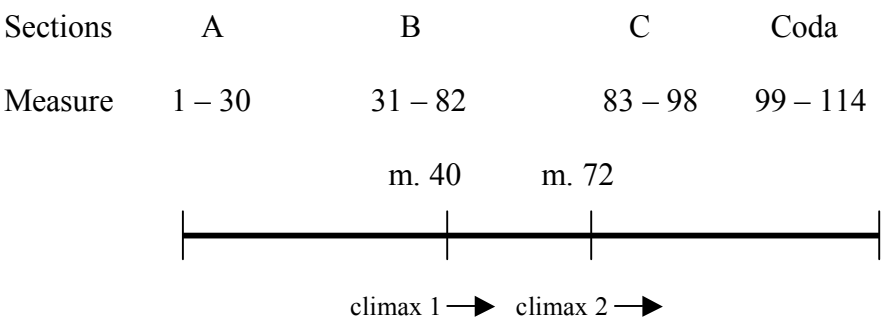
Table 5.1: Musical form and golden section in "Cheering"

Sections	Intro.	A							B		A'		Coda
		a	b	a'	b'	a''	b''	a'''	c	d	a''''	b''''	
Sub-sections	1 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 37	38 - 47	48 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 71	72 - 89	90 - 102	103 - 137	138 - 154	155 - 161	162 - 188
Tempo	q. = 112 – 120	q. = 100							q. = 120		q. = 132		q. = 96
Duration	Ca. 10 sec.	Ca. 166 sec.							Ca.96 sec.		Ca.43 sec.		Ca. 68 sec.

Measure (161-20) x 0.618= 87
Duration (166+96+43) x 0.618= 188

The golden section can be observed in the same form in *Song in Winter*. The golden section falls in measure 72, the climax of the piece where all the instruments start to emphasize the repeated chordal figures with the dynamic marking ***sfz***, accompanied by the dadi's wave-like contour. Beginning in measure 40, where the music gradually forms a climax with same chordal figures as in the golden section of measure 72, the section indicates an approximate negative golden section. It is the first time the zheng appears with thirty-second notes in an up-and-down contour.

Figure 5.7: Golden section and negative golden in *Song in Winter*



The golden section is an important formal design that Chen absorbed from the West. It appears in other of Chen's pieces such as *Sparkle*, the Piano Concerto and *Spring Festival*. Although the divisions of golden sections in the pieces provided above as examples are not exact, it still shows Chen's conscious or subconscious awareness of proportion of form and the placement of climax in its form.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND APPENDIX

Chen Yi's music is a mixture of East and West, reflecting her life journey through two different cultures, tying together the two major influences in her life. Her process of musical synthesis manages to maintain balance between the two distinct components, one improvisatory, the other more systematic. Her absorption of post-tonal compositional techniques, such as pitch organization, rhythmic series and formal structure, is the more rational part of her music, supporting the perceptual part, in which folk elements are manipulated in a more improvisatory way. By grappling with musical elements from Chinese traditional music and elements from Western 20th century music, she finds the common traits applicable to both sides so that these can be connected and developed further.

Throughout this paper, we have examined the ways in which Chen combines Eastern and Western elements. For example, we have seen in *Song in Winter* that the pitch class set (0, 2, 5) in the twelve-tone row in the harpsichord's part is manifested in the pentatonic materials with other instruments. In *Ancient Dances,* instruments that share idiosyncrasies are used to echo and support each other's sounds. In *Fiddle Suite,* the decorative notes in the erhu part are developed and become a micropolyphonic texture. In addition to making use of differences between Chinese and Western music to create contrast and drama, we have seen diverse textures used in collage, each part distinct, to create gradations and rich sonorities in support of the solo instrument in each movement of *Fiddle Suite*,.

Whether the musical ideas are inspired by East or West, Chen still strives to put personal innovation into the music, forging all the elements into a more abstract form. Timbre, an element as important as texture in her music, is both used as a motif and developed in pieces such as *Chinese Fables* and *Ancient Dances*. Some of the timbres she creates have traits of Chinese ensembles, even though they are played by Western instruments. Chen combines traditional Chinese techniques with Western instrumental extended techniques, and presents them in different ways, transforming them, thus creating unfamiliar and often unique sounds. All of the selected pieces discussed in the dissertation include Chinese traditional instruments. Chen retains the idiosyncrasies of Chinese instruments and uses their singular quality as an inspiration for the Western instruments. Chinese traditional instruments add to her palette.

Chen finds inspiration in Chinese literary arts, along with elements from Chinese traditional music like ornamentation and repetition with variations, as we have seen in *Song in Winter* and *Ning* in Chapter 3. These are supported by the compositional techniques and formal structure from 20th century music such as twelve-tone row, rhythmic series and golden section as shown in Chapters 4 and 5. Chen's music contains Chinese music's subtleties and improvisational quality and a desire to control the musical elements with more systemized organization.

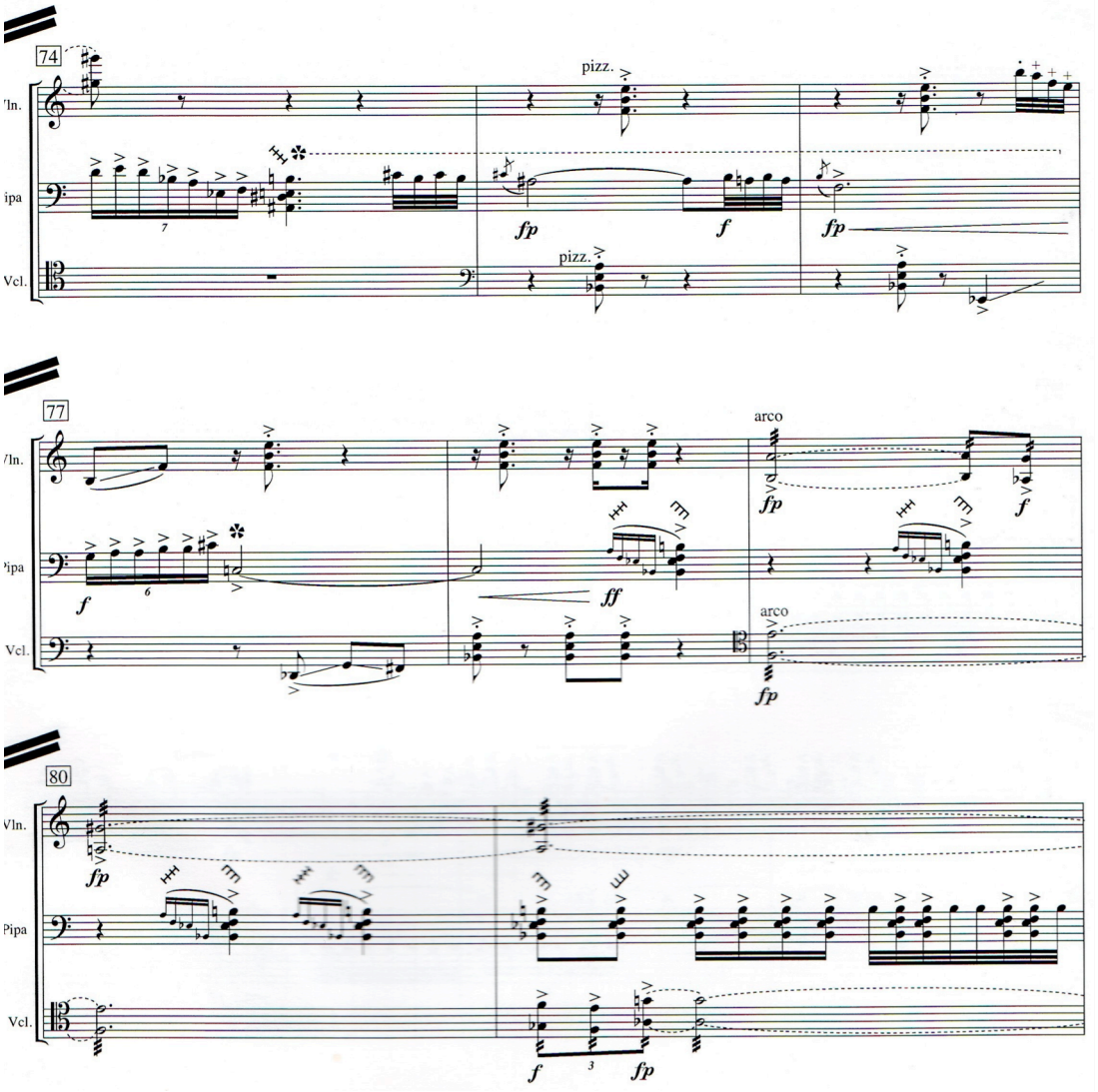
APPENDIX

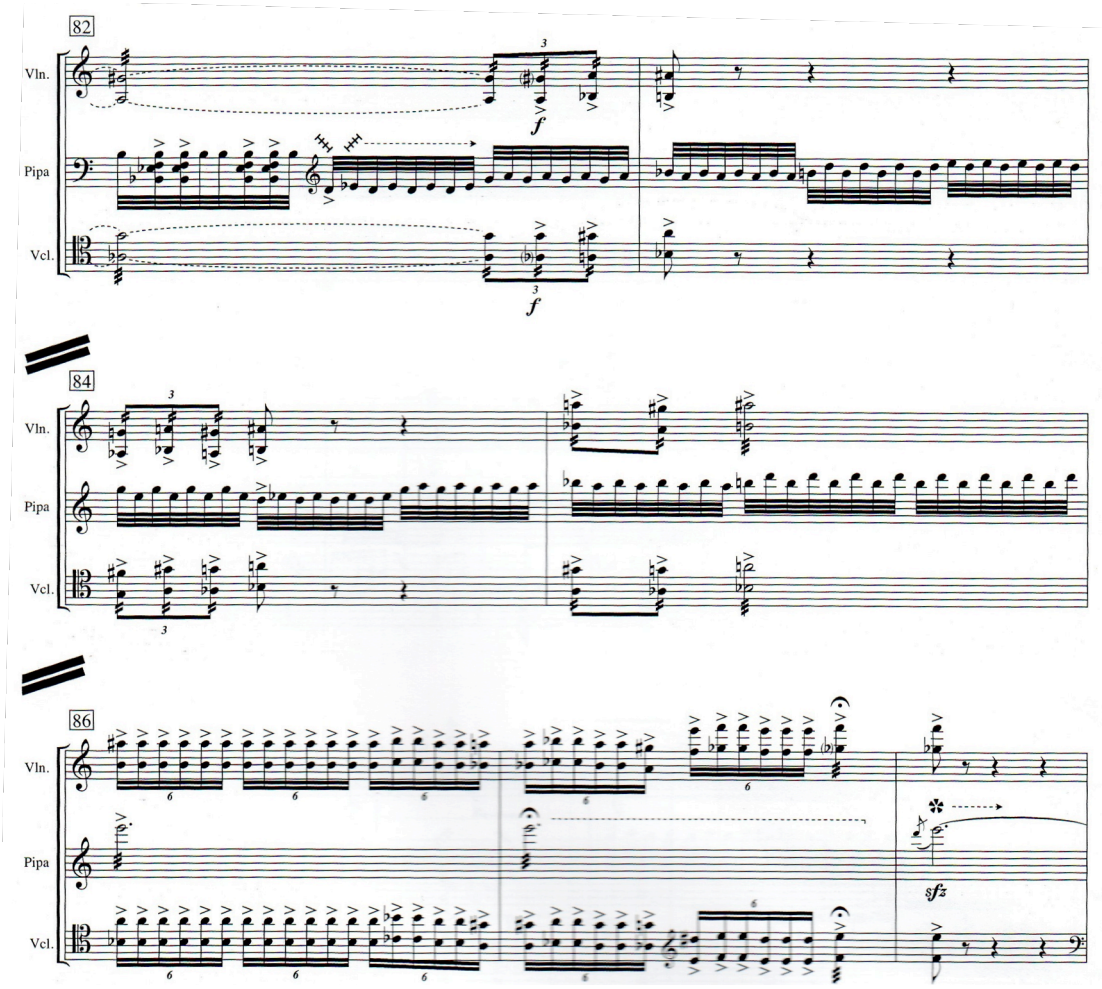
CHEN YI'S ORIGINAL SCORES AND SYMBOLS FOR THE TECHNIQUES

In her pieces, Chen maintains the traditional Chinese instrumental techniques, notated with traditional symbols, and this adds subtlety to her music. Some of the musical examples provided in this dissertation do not include the descriptions of the original symbols in the Chinese instrumental parts. This appendix provides a detailed explanation of the symbols in her scores that present techniques as notated traditionally.

The traditional symbols not only represent certain techniques, they also imply the harmonies. For example, the symbol "" in the music example below represents *sao* technique, which means outward sweep of all four strings. Since Chinese traditional music notated with cipher notation indicates only the skeletal melodies, when the symbol is applied to certain notes, open strings are to be strummed along with the notated notes. In the piece *Ning*, the pipa's third and forth strings are retuned to D# and Bb, thus when the symbol "  " is applied, the harmony created by the four strings (A, E, D#, Bb) in the piece is different than the traditional one (A, E, D, A). The symbol "  " represents the *lun* technique, which indicates using all the five fingers to pluck the strings constantly and evenly, producing an effect similar to tremolo.

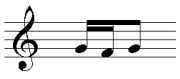
Example 6.1: Original score of *Ning*, bar 74 to 83





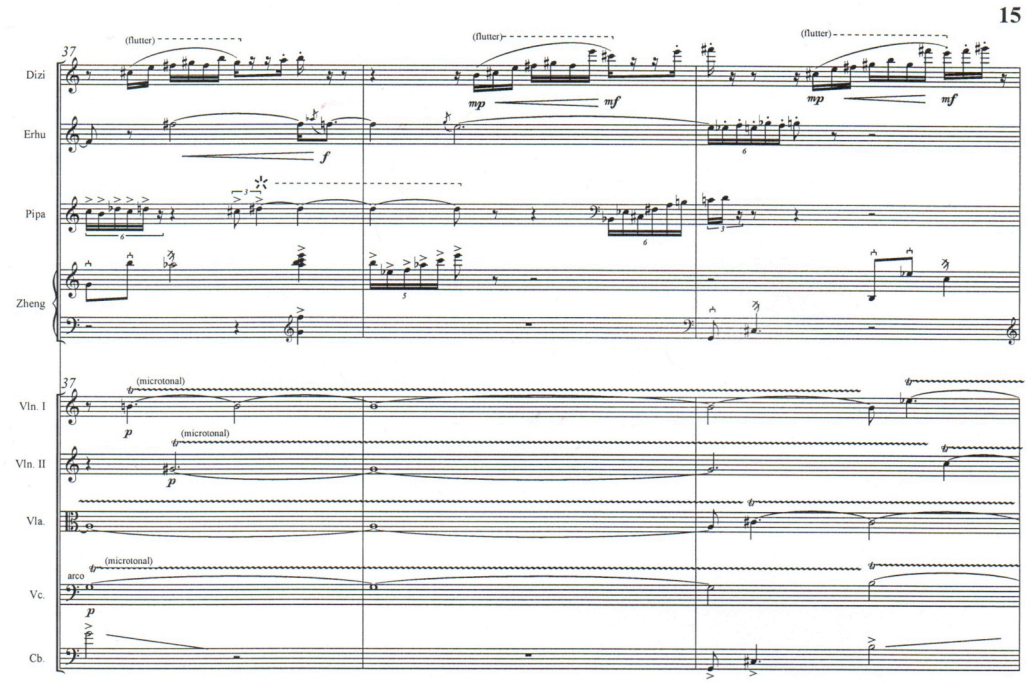
More traditional pipa techniques can be seen in *Ancient Dances*, as in Chapter 4, example 4.10, measure 108 manifests a traditional pipa technique called *jiao xian*, which is played by twisting two strings together, (possibly the first string under the second or vice versa), and plucking with the right hand, resulting in percussive sounds. Measure 124 requires the player to pull all the strings outward and then back inward again, as the arrow indicating the left-hand technique of pull the strings, resulting in pitch bends. "⟍⟋" in the score indicates play two strings at the same time. More specifically, "⟍" indicates plucking the strings downward with index finger's fingernail and "⟋" indicates plucking the strings upward with thumb's fingernail. In the case of measure 114, both fingers are

required to pluck the strings rapidly to produce a tremolo effect. A tremolo effect produced with the two fingers is quite different than the effect produced by the *lun* which requires all five fingers to pluck the strings evenly. With two fingers, the sound of the tremolo is more clear and crisp. Measure 118 indicates pushing the strings inward or outward to get the interval between F and B. The symbol "" in measure 121 indicates wide vibrato, produced by pulling the strings. The symbol "" in measure 123 is called *bing xian*, where the player binds the multiple strings together on the left hand, requiring quite a bit of left hand strength. In the case of measure 123, all four strings are required to be played at once, sweeping across.

Zheng and pipa are plucked instruments. Although they are held differently -- .one is placed on a stand while the other is placed on the legs -- the two instruments share many similar techniques. Like the pipa, the pitches of the zheng are easily bent back and forth because of the loose tuning of the strings. In Chen's original score of *Ancient Beauty*, in "The Clay Figurines," one of the traditional techniques, *xia bo yin,* indicated with the symbol " ", which means bending the pitch down with left hand to produce a rapid lower neighboring tone. For example, if the symbol of *xia bo yin* is indicated on the pitch G, the musical figure is played as  .

In musical example 6.1 the sound effect produced by the technique *xia bo yin* is supported by the string's microtonal trill, creating an undulating, mercurial sonority.

Example 6 .2: Chen's original score of *Ancient Beauty*, "The Clay Figurines", bar 37 to 39



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